

**THE REPRESENTATION OF THE INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES OF MEXICO IN DIEGO RIVERA'S
NATIONAL PALACE MURAL,
(1929-1935)**

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**Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

April 2007

**(Separate book of illustrations available in hard
copy from University of Nottingham)**

Acknowledgements

The achievement of this work would certainly not have been possible without the talent and intelligence of Professor Mark Millington who patiently supported me through every step and helped me through a number of seemingly impossible barriers. Deep appreciation is also due to Professor Fintan Cullen for providing challenging debate, invaluable research guidance and crucial advice. Thank you to Professor Michael Hatt for his critical insights into the work in the early days of the project. I am also indebted to the ahrc for their support and faith in my studies and to the Logia Quetzalcóatl México D.F. for their interest and care in providing information.

Thank you to Iona Macintyre, Beatriz Vera-López, Graham Shaw, Victoria Ríos-Castaño, Judy Wang and Ezi Nochiri for their sympathy and moral support and, in some cases, proofreading. Thanks to Pauline Harris for her companionship and discussion of sociological matters, inside and out of, the worlds of French and yoga. A big thank you to Dr Nick Stevenson for his admirable courage and kind support through the most difficult times and to Dr Christian Karner, for his empathy and encouragement, as well as some thought-provoking advice on theories of nationalism. I am also very grateful to Professor Catherine Davies and Dr Nuala Finnegan for a stimulating and thorough viva voce examination and for their useful suggestions.

Great appreciation is due for the patient work of Alison Stevens in Interlibrary Loans; her diligent excavation of documents and brave attempts at pronunciation. Thanks also to Anne-Marie Llewellyn and Tracey O'Shea for their friendly support in library and other matters. Also, to my students at the University of Nottingham with their stimulating ideas and to all the school children who have helped me keep my feet on the ground and my studies alive.

To my sister Michelle-Carmen for being herself and my mother María-Carmen for her practical help. Thank you also to Kathleen Chapman for her words of wisdom. Most importantly, to my darling Jasmine, thank you for being such a great companion and inspiration over these years.

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Abstract

This thesis is a multidisciplinary project, drawing on the discourses of Visual Cultural Studies, Latin American history and Critical Theory. Insights from each of these disciplines interact to investigate the representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico in the mural triptych entitled *History of the Mexican People* painted by Diego Rivera in the National Palace, Mexico City between 1929 and 1935. The main focus is an exploration of the mural as a cultural text, which is formed through socio-political structures and homogenising nationalist visions. The artist is seen as partly a product of history who acts, both consciously and subconsciously, as a conduit for such historical structures. The investigation requires a multi-dimensional approach as it includes emotional, aesthetic, sociological, political, cultural, philosophical, biographical and material elements.

A close-reading of the National Palace mural as a cultural 'text' is undertaken in order to deconstruct certain culturally-specific political myths. The production of the fresco triptych is inextricably interlinked with the construction of the post-revolutionary Mexican nation and socio-cultural mythologies regarding the 'Indian' which are central to nationalist imagery and the post-revolutionary, anthropological theories of *indigenismo*.

Certain distinctive racial strands of nationalist mythology which are represented in the mural are analysed within the framework of Anthony D. Smith's (1999) theory of historical ethno-mythology. I argue, following Smith, that what gives nationalism its power are the

myths, memories, traditions and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular living past has been, can be and is rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern, nationalist intelligentsias. Smith's universal theory has not previously been applied in depth to a complex concrete situation. This thesis relates the insights of the theory of nationalist ethno-mythology to the tangible cultural text of *History of the Mexican People*.

Introduction

Diego Rivera is regarded as the quintessential Mexican artist. He is known worldwide as the champion of the Mexican people and advocate of the 'Indian'. His works are part of a powerfully reconstructed, national cultural heritage, which reinvents the past in the service of the present. Notwithstanding the public works themselves, the persistent cultural industry which has proliferated from them ranging from tourist merchandise, extensive reproductions illustrating all manner of Mexican books to kitsch of popular culture exemplified by the Julie Taymor's film *Frida* (2002), is testimony to the fact that Rivera's images have a potent after-life in the Mexican cultural imagination and are still a vibrant force in the international reflection of Mexico.

This thesis is a multidisciplinary project being informed by the over-lapping disciplines of Latin American history, Visual Culture and socio-political theory. The aim is to challenge the prevailing cultural assumptions surrounding Rivera's work and re-evaluate the notion of the artist as the promoter of the 'Indian'. The theoretical framework of the thesis is predicated on the perception that Rivera is, in part, acting as a conduit, channelling hegemonic socio-cultural formulations in the context of post-revolutionary Mexico. It is therefore an analysis of the mural as a historical artefact which poses many questions as to the political significance of the culture of public display.

The investigation therefore necessarily encompasses aesthetic, historical and socio-political dimensions, as it is a study of culture and its political significance.

Literature Review and Aims

Unsurprisingly, varied commentators have analysed Rivera's monumental work from a plethora of theoretical perspectives. A selection of the most significant of these will offer an overview of the theoretical framework which provides the academic research context of this thesis. The literature dealing with Rivera's representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico is, however, negligible and I outline the examples from which the innovations of this thesis develop.

The wide-ranging catalogue *Diego Rivera-A Retrospective*, edited by Cynthia Newman-Helms was originally published alongside the first major North American exhibition which was held at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The exhibition spanning the sixty years of the artists career was held in the year 1986, when Mexico celebrated the centennial of Rivera's birth in Guanajuato on December 13 1886. The retrospective contains ten essays dealing specifically with different features of Rivera who Linda Downs and Ellen Sharp describe as 'this 20th century renaissance man' (1986: 11). These writings serve to illustrate the multi-faceted character of Rivera and his wide ranging interests and education. The artist's skills included 'draftsman, painter, printmaker, sculptor, book illustrator, costume and set designer and architect, as well as one of the first collectors of pre-Columbian art and a political activist' (Downs and Sharp 1986: 11). The essays tackle Rivera's 'encyclopaedic interests and studies [which] led him into such diverse fields as science; medicine; archaeology; social, cultural and political history; philosophy; mythology; and industrial technology' (Downs and Sharp 1986: 11). This extensive catalogue of skills testifies to the multi-dimensional nature of Rivera's

work and its monumental significance in aesthetic, historical and socio-political terms. In combination the essays present a selection of divergent views which also serve to illustrate the broad scope of responses to Rivera's work.

Of particular relevance to this thesis and Rivera's socio-historical representation of race are essays by Betty Ann Brown and Francis V. O'Connor. In 'The Past Idealised: Diego Rivera's Use of pre-Columbian Imagery', Brown documents the sources of the iconography in the artist's murals which are derived from various records, sculptures and artefacts of indigenous civilisations. She asserts that the artist's images of the past were 'definitely influenced by his *indigenista* stance' characterised by a portrayal of 'pre-Columbian civilisations as bright, glorious, utopias' leading to 'images so transformed as to be virtually unreal' (Brown 1986: 154).

In 'An Iconographic Interpretation of Diego Rivera's 'Detroit Industry' Murals in Terms of Their Orientation to the Cardinal Points of the Compass', O'Connor (1986) explores Rivera's employment of renaissance and Aztec alignment in his mural works. She emphasises Rivera's Eurocentrism, citing the Italian Renaissance murals as the most important influence on Rivera's fresco works.

In the same collection, Jorge Hernández Campos (1986) observes that the genesis of the Mexican School of painters occurred within the context of international artistic developments. Elements of the employment of indigenous iconography and style are described in a general manner in the Detroit Retrospective although none of these look at the representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico themselves.

The most trenchant analyses of Rivera's work focuses on his political stance as an advocate of dialectical materialism. In 'Rivera's Concept of History', Ida Rodríguez-Prampolini asserts that amongst 'all of Rivera's work, the stairwell at the Palacio Nacional represents his most clearly defined attempt to develop the materialist concept of history in the context of painting' (1986: 132).

Art historians Leonard Folgarait (1998) and David Craven (2002) in *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico* and *Art and Revolution in Latin America 1910-1990* respectively, employ more extensive and nuanced applications of socio-political theory to the work of the Mexican Muralists. The focus is on the production of artworks as cultural texts within the context of a unique historical juncture. Folgarait puts forward the idea of viewing the National Palace Mural as ritual and suggests that the work acts as a palliative to create certain viewing responses and readings of the Revolutionary rhetoric which the project draws on:

In a time of deliberate maintenance of the status quo, no one was to feel politicized or excited or provoked in any manner. Mexican citizens were to ingest Revolutionary rhetoric in a passive and unaggressive manner, and therefore be transformed in profound, yes, but subtle and undramatic ways through [...] various rituals. (Folgarait 1998: 197)

These 'subtle and undramatic ways' are the mainstay of what is described by Michael Billig in *Banal Nationalism* as 'flagging the

nation', which refers to the ways in which nationalism is expressed in small and seemingly innocuous situations which combine to normalise hegemonic assumptions. Folgarait (1998) considers the murals in a socio-historical context and also describes them as a nationalist flag, emphasising their political role as a form of propaganda in the post-revolutionary decades. He also explores the contradictions and paradoxes between the rhetoric and practice of the revolution which he believes has left 'millions of Mexicans, to this day, in permanent and disillusioned struggle', describing the years 1920-1940 as a period which 'seemed perpetually to promise fulfilling the goals of social liberation of the Revolution of 1910, but equally constantly to break that promise' (Folgarait 1998: 2). He emphasises the necessity of considering the murals as deeply embedded in their social context and therefore reflecting the same degree of restrictions to understanding as the social period in which they were produced. The governmental patronage, locations at sites of power and relationships between politicians and painters suggest an intimate connection between mural art and politics. This was part of the struggle to maintain the centralised power base of the Mexican post-revolutionary state throughout the period of reconstruction 1920-1934 during the presidencies of Alvaro Obregón (1920-1924) and Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1934).

Folgarait considers the global context of the supposed 'revolutionary' art created at the time, drawing parallels with the processes of social upheavals occurring in the 1920s and 1930s in Italy, Germany, the Soviet Union and the United States and later in China. He describes how a 'mythology of the Revolutionary Mexican'

(1998: 195) was created through ‘different instruments of mass propaganda [...which] succeeded when as much private experience as possible was made over into public, into the arena of controllable subjecthood’ (Folgarait 1998: 195).

The survival of the post-Revolutionary Mexican state was dependent upon a rhetoric which both reinforced the tenets of the revolutionary constitution and sought to integrate a highly diverse population into a unified people. The removal of the armed threat of masses of people had occurred in the tumultuous years of revolutionary change. This rhetoric created an imagined reality which channelled the hopes and aspirations of the people ¹ into a socio-political mirage. Folgarait describes the National Palace Mural as an example of a ‘liminal region, [...] at the edge of and in between places’ which was and is a ‘place of discourse, of politics, of ideology, of art, [as well as ...] the place of ritual, ultimately the most powerful “place” in the socio-political geography of post-Revolutionary Mexico’ (Folgarait 1998: 195).

This supposed ‘dialectic of control’ described as integral to the ritual interaction between the Mexican people and the ‘liminal space’ of the mural is viewed quite differently by Craven who sees the murals’ willing suspension of reality as a tool for political intervention by the active subject. The floating signifier of the Mexican Revolution is seen as a powerful agent capable of shaping the signified by stimulating political action.

¹ This overarching term ‘the people’ is a homogenising social category which denies the complex reality of varied racial identities.

In *Diego Rivera as Epic Modernist* (1997) Craven sees the necessity of assessing art as a formative force in its own right exceeding a mechanical demonstration at the level of socio-political values. Craven thus argues that neither art nor politics can be reduced to a definition of each other. He contends that it is erroneous to confuse art with politics and equally to separate art completely from politics.

Craven describes the eclectic nature of Rivera's work, his stylistic and personal diversity which, although consciously aligned to a strong political commitment, manifest themselves with multi-faceted and at times contradictory results. He recognises 'several Diego Riveras who exist in an uneasy, sometimes deeply conflictual relation to each other' (Craven 1997: 2). Characterising one of these Riveras as an 'epic modernist', Craven highlights the Rivera who created an 'epic chronology of the Mexican people' with 'unprecedented content' in which the heroes of monumental public art were for the first time ordinary people (Craven 1997: 4).

Craven also cites Rivera's considerable revolutionary credentials and goes on to describe his 'epic modernism', which he sees as most strikingly demonstrated in the National Palace Murals. Craven describes 'a remarkable affinity between Brecht's "epic theater" and Rivera's "epic modernism" [which] occurred because both artists produced examples of a hybrid "alternative modernism" that was adroitly based on the deployment of the ideas of classical Marxism' (Craven 1997: 123).

According to Craven this 'hybrid, alternative modernism' of Rivera's National Palace Mural is comprised of elements similar to Brecht's Epic Theatre of the 1920s and 1930s: amongst the tenets of Brechtian

theatre he cites ‘the presentation of “man as process” rather than the belief in “man as fixed point;” and, 8) an appeal more to reason than to feeling’ (Brecht in Craven 1997: 123). Contrary to Folgarait, Craven celebrates Rivera and acknowledges his considerable artistic achievements as well as his ‘lifelong commitment to socialism, popular democracy and racial equality’ (Craven, 1997: 5).

In *Art and Revolution in Latin America* Craven also explores both the revolutionary government’s attempt to socialise the arts and the engagement of the working classes in the visual arts, made newly accessible through social change. Again Craven considers the pressing problem of creating a ‘dialogical art’ – one that reconfigures the artistic form rather than one that reproduces a populist art to maintain the status quo. He considers the revolutionary artist as an essential force for the transformation of society, who bestowed new ways of thinking about art, ideology and class within revolutionary development.

The idea of a society’s understanding of itself moving forward through progressive re-appropriation, is also illustrated by Craven who posits that ‘historical development frequently advances by means of cultural hybrids that move simultaneously both forward and backward in time’ (Craven 2002: 54). He asserts that the National Palace mural was an ‘epic thesis that Rivera uses to orchestrate a seemingly unwieldy profusion of historical material into something like a coherent narrative, without, however, taking away from the dynamic and open-ended character of such a proactive reading of historical progression’ (Craven 2002: 55). Fleetinglly considering the question of representation and the indigenous, he concludes the final chapter of *Diego Rivera as Epic Modernist* with a quote from Frida Kahlo, attesting

to Rivera's commitment to the cause of improving the lives of indigenous Mexicans:

He has only one great social concern: to raise the standard of living of the Mexican Indians, whom he loves so deeply. This love he has portrayed in painting after painting. (1949 quoted in Craven 1997: 169)

Art in Latin America The Modern Era, 1820-1980 edited by Dawn Ades is the catalogue which accompanied the 1992 exhibition on the 500th anniversary of Columbus's landing in America. In a chapter entitled 'The Mexican Mural Movement', Ades discusses both the work of *los tres grandes*,² Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco as well as lesser known muralists such as Carlos Mérida, Jean Charlot, Juan O'Gorman, Fernando Leal and Gerardo Murillo (Dr Atl). Describing these artists as 'the most vigorous and creative of the cultural vanguard of revolutionary Mexico' she clearly sees them as influential leaders creating and consolidating a revolution which 'brought a new consciousness to Mexico' as well as 'hope and optimism' with the beginnings of reconstruction in 1920 (Ades 1989: 151). Ades also devotes an entire chapter to the representation of *indigenismo*. In this chapter entitled 'Indigenism and Social Realism', she asserts that the official praise of the 'Indian' and indigenous policies was expressed in various ways but did not have a significant effect on coherent social action. She critiques *indigenismo*'s tendency to merge all Indian peoples together as one 'other' nation. She also questions Rivera's tendency to treat injustice towards the

² This term will be explained in more detail in Chapter One.

Indian in terms of a past rather than a contemporary context. Ades notes how *indigenismo* in Mexico covers a variety of different and even contradictory attitudes. She states that the work of Rivera, as opposed to the more politically critical works of Orozco and Siqueiros, maintains ‘the promises of the Revolution unavoidably and permanently in the people’s consciousness, however slow and difficult the action may be to implement them’ (Ades 1989: 165).

In *Los Murales del Palacio Nacional* (1997) edited by the influential Argentinian journalist Raquel Tibol, Itzel Rodríguez Mortellaro notes how the murals were deeply embedded in hegemonic discourse:

Rivera, como hombre de su tiempo recogió en su obra consciente o inconscientemente, la visión del mundo de su época; o para ser más preciso, la visión que la elite [...] revolucionaria tuvo de México y de los mexicanos. (1997: 85)

Carlos Fuentes notes the pedagogic aspects of the nationalist vision of the works which presents this post-revolutionary moment of history as the pinnacle of a teleological linear progression: ‘[...] como nos enseñaron en la escuela, mediante el paso de mundo indígena prehispánico a conquista española, a Colonia, a Independencia, Reforma y Revolución’ (Fuentes 1997: 21).

This wide-ranging selection of writers all recognise the diversity of Rivera’s work. Many studies have addressed the explicit nationalist elements. The question of the representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico has not, however been addressed as the central focus of any works to date. This thesis therefore undertakes a detailed analysis of

the *History of the Mexican People* with a specific focus on the image of the 'Indian' in the socio-cultural mythology of nationalist hegemonic discourse.

Structure

The thesis is divided into two parts: The first two chapters give the broad context for the second part which is a detailed close-reading of the National Palace Mural triptych *History of the Mexican People* in the following three chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the main socio-political influences which shaped the Mexican Mural Movement. A descriptive overview of the most important elements which created the unique situation into which Mexican muralism was born is presented in this chapter that is the Mexican Revolution, the nationalist education programme initiated by Minister of Education José Vasconcelos and the theories of Mexican *indigenismo*. The emphasis is on the political framework underpinning the socio-cultural mythologies of the 'Indian' which were produced in the context of the forging of post-revolutionary, national identity.

Chapter Two briefly sketches the different representations of the 'Indian' by the painters known as *los tres grandes* as they interacted with the rhetoric of nation-building. These artists were and still are, largely regarded as the three main muralists: Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. This chapter describes the stark differences between the muralists, who are commonly regarded as a unified movement. The focus of this chapter is the diverse perspectives of the artists differing representations of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Their interactions with, and reactions to, the discourse of post-revolutionary *indigenismo* will be described

through a brief analysis of various examples of their public art works. These initial chapters provide the aesthetic, historical and socio-political context for the remainder of the thesis which undertakes a micro-analysis of the one seminal epic work by Rivera.

Chapters Three to Five present a close-reading of the *History of the Mexican People* as a cultural text which correlates with an understanding of the micro-technologies of power which are present and represented in culturally-specific historical situations.

Methodologies

Anthony D. Smith's (1999) universal theory of nationalist ethno-symbolism is employed to deepen understanding of the portrayal of the 'Indian' in the National Palace Mural. Each of the components of Smith's theory is applied to distinct facets of the epic triptych. The focus will be on cultural *mythologies* and the formation of hegemonic discourses which generate images of an homogenised and unified nation. The themes of manufacturing a consensual cultural memory and the invention of heritage form a major part of this investigation.

Smith comments that, although the ethnic components of nationalist mythology are in some senses socio-culturally specific, '[n]evertheless, they possess a common form that can usefully be broken down into its component myths' (Smith 1999: 62). He sees the ethnic elements integral to nationalism as historically and geographically ubiquitous, whilst each nation itself must be historically situated. Smith provides this insightful theory yet does not apply his model in depth to any particular socio- historical 'text'.

I will be applying the elements of Smith's universal theory of 'Myths of Ethnic Descent' to the specific cultural text of the National Palace mural. This application will be woven into the third layer of Prownian analysis in which theoretical speculations are made. The component parts of Smith's ethno-symbolic nationalist mythology are entitled: 'A Myth of Temporal Origins, or *When We Were Begotten*', 'A Myth of Location and Migration, or *Where We Came From and How We Got Here*', 'A Myth of Ancestry, or *Who Begot Us and How We Developed*', 'A Myth of the Heroic Age, or *How We Were Freed and Became Glorious*', 'A Myth of Decline, or *How We Fell into a State of Decay*' and 'A Myth of Regeneration, or *How To Restore the Golden Age and Renew Our Community as "in the Days of Old"*' (Smith 1999: 63-68).

The rhetoric of post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism was predicated on an image of new beginnings. The murals were so closely linked to the new post-revolutionary government at the time of their conception under Vasconcelos's initial direction as Minister of Education that Charlot calls them 'corollaries of his own philosophy applied to the social system' (1963: 82). Charlot describes the innovative impact of Vasconcelos's project as the '*deus ex machina* of the Mexican renaissance' (1963: 82). In contrast to this projected nationalist rhetoric of the 'new' post-revolutionary state and attendant socio-cultural context, Smith observes that in reality national identities are formed over time:

Nations are historical phenomena, not only in the generic sense that they are embedded in particular collective pasts and emerge, sometimes over long time spans, through

specific historical processes, but also because by definition, they embody shared memories traditions and hopes of the populations designated as parts of the nation. (Smith 1999: 10)

The historical roots of images of the indigenous Mexican, which were integral to the presentation of a supposed post-revolutionary unity of Mexican people, can be traced through forms of visual culture as far back as the seventeenth century. Many of these representations of the 'Indian', which were the forerunners of such stereotypes reinstated by Rivera, were produced in both European and non-European academic settings. The next component interwoven into this thesis will illustrate some of the persistence of these stereotypical images in each designated zone of the mural and observe the degree of either continuity or rupture between pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary images.

Prownian Methodology

The close-reading of the text in Chapters Three, Four and Five, combined with the complexity of the historical material presented in the National Palace mural, require an organisational framework which allows for holistic attention to the aesthetic, historical and socio-political dimensions of the work. The myriad forms which communication takes have the potential to construct, distort, obfuscate, reflect and reinforce socio-historical meanings and power. The aesthetic and material qualities of the work are highly significant as they are the substance through which socio-psychical

representation is transmitted. Consequently, there is a danger of distortion through a solely intellectual analysis, as this would underestimate the powerful emotional impact of the whole work on the audience. It is indispensable therefore to capture the character of the mural as a whole experience before extracting isolated elements for theoretical analysis. The material reality of the aesthetic object is fundamental to understanding the motivation behind and effectiveness of the transmitted messages. In order to examine the material reality of the mural and the dynamic interaction with socio-psychical cultural forms I will be employing the analytical structure outlined by Jules David Prown in his essay 'Mind in Matter' (Prown 2001: 67-95). This methodology resonates with Folgarait's observation that the mural paintings 'can best be considered as places and events rather than things alone' (Folgarait 1998: 32). This emphasises the culturally specific character of mind in matter, as the objects under consideration, in this case Rivera's murals, 'have built into their material qualities aspects of human use and have purpose of behaviour unique to their medium' (Folgarait 1998: 32). Prown describes the 'mind in matter' as the creative force behind any artefact as an expression of material culture, stating that '[m]aterial culture as a study is based upon the obvious fact that the existence of a man-made object is concrete evidence of the presence of a human intelligence operating at the time of fabrication' (Prown 2001: 70). To uncover the intricacies of the mind in matter we must also consider the details of the interaction between the psychological, aesthetic and socio-historical dimensions which co-create each other in a dynamic relationship.

Prown's method of object analysis progresses through three discrete stages which may be followed in series to discipline the investigator's cultural perspective and minimise bias. In the first stage of Prownian analysis (*description*), the observer must suspend pre-conceived judgments and rationalisations and fine-tune the awareness of sensory and intellectual responses to undertake a meticulous account of the material nature of the object. The exploration moves on from this *description* in which the internal evidence of the object itself is recorded to *deduction* in which the relationship between object and viewer is interpreted. Finally, Prown posits a *speculation* stage in which hypotheses and questions are shaped, leading outwards from the object to a framework for verifying and understanding its true character in context (Prown 2001: 79). This method of analysis allows for sharply focused methodical reading which acknowledges the multi-dimensional quality of the work.

The Prownian method combines both intellectual and intuitive tools of perception as historical and material 'fact' is investigated alongside aesthetic response through understanding its true character. The *aesthetic*, *historical* and *socio-cultural* dimensions will be considered in turn through the stages of *description*, *deduction* and *speculation* with the knowledge that the 'real' experience of the mural involves all three elements in a constantly shifting, dynamic interaction with the culturally specific viewing perspective of the observer.

The methodological structure put forward by Prown is a flexible analytical tool which is employed with varying emphases throughout Chapters Three, Four and Five, the close-reading of the text.

Chapter One: The Mexican Mural Movement

The Mexican Mural Movement or the 'Mexican Mural Renaissance',³ began in 1921 in the political context of post-revolutionary Mexico. The muralists painted vast works of art on a diverse range of public buildings, including theatres, hospitals, schools, union headquarters, and governmental offices. The three most high-profile artists Diego Rivera (1886 – 1957), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1898 – 1974) and José Clemente Orozco (1883 – 1949) were commonly known as *los tres grandes* (the three great ones).⁴ Tibol states that from 1921 to the present day 'más de trescientos artistas ejecutaron unos mil quinientos murales en cincuenta técnicas diferentes' (1997: 29). There is no official end date for the Mexican Mural Movement. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be considering the years 1920-1940 as this is the period when the murals were most influential. However, the work of the muralists continues to have a profound impact on Mexican art and identity.

The Mexican Mural Movement was born under the patronage of the new post-revolutionary state and is unquestionably one of the most powerful expressions of public culture in history. Antonio Rodríguez described this aesthetic and political movement as:

³ The Mexican Mural Movement is frequently described as the 'Mural Renaissance'.

⁴ It is important to note, that, although these were the three most celebrated muralists, there were many others such as Ramón Alva Guadarrama, Jean Charlot, Ernesto García Cabral, Emilio García Cahero, Germán Cueto, Xavier Guerrero, Fernando Leal, Carlos Mérida, Roberto Montenegro, Máximo Pacheco, and Fermín Revueltas.

[...]the logical result of the historic events which reached their climax in the revolution of 1910 [which...] placed workmen and peasants, and all those who took part in the struggle for land and freedom, in the forefront of national endeavour. It gave dignity to the Indian, who until then had been looked down on or treated as an object of compassion. (1969: 159)

This belief that the muralists championed the cause of the worker, peasant and 'Indian' was widely held in Mexico and was often put forward by the artists themselves. The first public statement written jointly by the key muralists entitled the *Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores de México*, testifies to this alleged championing of the working people and the indigenous soul of Mexico. This manifesto declared that '[e]l arte del pueblo de México es la manifestación espiritual más grande y más sana del mundo y su tradición indígena es la mejor de todas' (1989 [1923]: 323). The *Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores de México* was signed by Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco in 1922 and published in 1923 in the radical paper *El Machete* in Mexico City.⁵ This manifesto illustrates the complex often contradictory views of the Mexican Mural Movement and is a culturally specific hybrid born of Western Marxism, European Modernism, a derivation of the discovery of nationalistic sovereignty that has characterised Mexico since independence and the socio-anthropological philosophy of *indigenismo*.

⁵ The '*Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores de México*' was also signed by, Xavier Guerrero, Fermín Revueltas, Ramón Alva Guadarrama, Germán Cueto and Carlos Mérida.

This complexity is largely a reflection of the chaotic political legacy of the Mexican Revolution and certain historical precedents which will be discussed later in the chapter. The received view of the muralists, as unambiguously representing the indigenous peoples of Mexico, will be challenged in this thesis. The depictions of the 'Indian' by the diverse range of painters known collectively as the Mexican Mural Movement, show strong variations amongst themselves, which can clearly be seen in the work of the most renowned muralists: Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco.

The Mexican Mural Movement cannot be restricted to compartmentalised discourses of ideological or artistic intentions. Octavio Paz declares that '[n]o es exagerado decir que ocupa un lugar único en la historia del arte del siglo XX.' He also holds that '[h]ay en la pintura mural mexicana una suerte de desgarramiento entre sus ambiciones estéticas y sus ambiciones ideológicas' (1994[1978]: 188). Both historico-political and artistic elements are important to gain valid insight into the socio-cultural impact of these works. The methodological approach to the subject must therefore have the objectives of understanding both a culturally specific point of history and the many dimensions which contribute to this moment. A full understanding of the impact of the work on Mexican national consciousness and politics must consider the macro-politics of history as well as the micro-political components which interweave in the creation of nationalist mythology. Néstor García Canclini highlights some of the complexities of myriad intersecting cultural dimensions:

Qué es el arte no es sólo una cuestión estética: hay que tomar en cuenta cómo se va respondiendo en la intersección de lo que hacen los periodistas y críticos, historiadores y museógrafos, marchands, coleccionistas y especuladores. De modo semejante, lo popular no se define por una esencia a priori sino por las estrategias inestables, diversas, con que construyen sus posiciones los propios sectores subalternos, y también por el modo en que el folclorista y el antropólogo ponen en escena la cultura popular para el museo o la academia, los sociológicos y los políticos para los partidos, los comunicólogos para los medios. (García Canclini 1989: 18)

In addition to García Canclini's proposal of the necessity of a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of culture, Hennessy points out that '[c]ultural dimensions need to be incorporated into general interpretations of the Revolution' (1991: 685). Hennessy also observes that previous research on the muralists has been inhibited by academic imperatives which have encouraged compartmentalisation as historians of art tend to study paintings in terms of autonomous styles. For a developed understanding of the socio-cultural, superstructural elements of political history, it is necessary to develop the interrelationship between disciplines, in order to create a holistic understanding and prevent a fragmented outlook.

An aspect of the diversity of ways, in which the muralists interacted with the multi-dimensional, socio-cultural environment in Mexico, can be seen through a brief look at certain perspectives of the

key artists of the movement, who are usually regarded as united in purpose. In *Art and Revolution*, Siqueiros recognised the close link between the shaping of Mexican national consciousness and artistic production in the post-revolutionary years: 'In our country's political struggle, we of the art and cinema world acquired a real knowledge of the men, geography, archaeology and general traditions of Mexico. We began to discover and understand the vitally urgent problems of our national identity' (Siqueiros 1975 [1945]: 84). In his autobiography, Orozco, proclaimed that the muralists were:

[...] hombres de acción, fuertes, sanos y instruidos' [...] '[l]a pintura mural se inició bajo muy buenos auspicios. Hasta los errores que cometió fueron útiles. Rompió la rutina en que había caído la pintura. Acabó con muchos prejuicios y sirvió para ver los problemas sociales desde nuevos puntos de vista. (quoted in Suárez 1972: 40)

Rivera, who laid claim to the founding of the Syndicate, declared that he intended to revive the ancient mural tradition of Mexico and to collectivise the individual powers of young Mexican artists:

¿Por qué organicé mi Sindicato de pintores y escultores en México? [...] mi plan de trabajo cooperativo por revivir el viejo arte de la decoración mural en México, fue el que logró acercar y concentrar los diversos poderes de los jóvenes artistas mexicanos, quienes hasta entonces habían

dispersado sus energías individuales al tratar de trabajar solos. (Rivera 1996[1924]: 56)

The Mexican Mural Movement was born into a situation which was both unpredictable and idiosyncratic. Siqueiros highlighted the uniqueness of the movement and stated that in the post-revolutionary decades: '[t]here was no comparable phenomenon in any other country. There were isolated mural painters who showed a sporadic interest in the technique, but there was no collective movement nor was there any attempt to create one' (1975 [1945]:7).⁶

A range of political intentions combined to produce the artworks which were explicitly political. Governmental sponsorship of the murals was often motivated by views which did not correlate with those of the artists themselves. Carlos Monsiváis asserts that President Alvaro Obregón, whose government (1920-1924) commissioned the first murals, was little interested in art but had a certain political imperative in mind: to project an international image which would combat the reputation of Mexico as a dangerous country of bandits and unruly masses.

⁶ The Mexican muralists were also highly influential on subsequent public art movements in times of social change in North America and Latin America. Other research has considered the collective mural projects which were influenced by the Mexican precedent. In *Painting on the Left*, Anthony Lee (1999) illustrates the influence of the work of Diego Rivera on the Federal Art Project in the USA during the New Deal (1933 – 40). In *Art and Revolution in Latin America 1910 – 1990*, Craven (2002) shows the effect of the Mexican mural movement on artists in revolutionary Cuba (1959 – 1989) and Nicaragua (1979 – 1990). However, these public, creative ventures had their own political objectives.

[...a Obregón] no le concierne el arte [...], pero le urge prestigiar su régimen liquidando o neutralizando la leyenda internacional de un país de bandidos y de turbas que extraen de sus casas a los ciudadanos decentes para fusilarlos en plena calle. (1986: 118)

The reception of the political content of these artworks should also be considered in order to understand the complexity and impact of the socio-cultural ‘realities’ they illustrate. However, a full investigation of this is outside the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, it has been noted that the modern Mexican collective consciousness retains the image of the murals as part of its shared vocabulary. Alistair Hennessey observes that since the post-revolutionary years, the ‘imagery has [...] become an integral component of every Mexican’s cultural baggage’ (1999: 685). This is partly due to the standing of *los tres grandes* in Mexico as popular public artists, whose ideas were widely respected by the Mexican people. The muralists became known as mouthpieces of the revolution in the time of reconstruction when the Mexican people were searching for a definition of themselves. This thesis argues that the Muralists collectively acted as a ‘mouthpiece’ for the complex socio-political situation of post-revolutionary Mexico. As Paz says in *El laberinto de la soledad*: ‘Es natural que después de la fase explosiva de la Revolución, el mexicano se recoja en sí mismo y, por un momento, se contemple’ (1993a: 145). Paz believed at one time that aesthetic creation or tangible action would do more to characterise and recreate the Mexican, than reified philosophical contemplations, analytical questioning and descriptions:

Pensaba que una obra de arte o una acción concreta definen más al mexicano—no solamente en tanto que lo expresan, sino en cuanto, al expresarlo, lo recrean—que la más penetrante de las descripciones. (1993a: 145)

This onetime perspective of Paz's on the political power of art, was shared by many Mexican workers. Rivera stated that although certain sectors of the bourgeoisie were offended by the murals, workers and peasants empathised with the muralists and afforded them protection by supporting their ostensibly united cause:

Sin embargo los trabajadores de la ciudad y del campo simpatizaban mucho con nosotros y nuestro arte y nos apoyaban, de manera que los otros no podían hacer mucho en contra nuestra.⁷ (Rivera 1996 [1928]: 119)

Hennesy (1999) claims that a distinctive characteristic of the reconstruction of society after the Mexican Revolution (1910 – 1917), was the way that artists as opposed to writers came forward as the intellectual vanguard. He states that, in the post-revolutionary decades, it was 'painters, and not intellectuals of the word, [who] gave form to the myths and utopian visions without which revolutionary movements find it hard to sustain a self-generating momentum' (Hennesy 1999: 681). As well as serving a public cause, the muralists were believed to be in a unique position in terms of intellectual and

⁷ Omission in original text.

artistic independence. Paz indicates that the critical autonomy of the post-revolutionary Mexican intelligentsia was largely co-opted or marginalised into government service: 'Su obra ha sido, en muchos aspectos, admirable; al mismo tiempo, han perdido independencia y su crítica resulta diluida, a fuerza de prudencia o de maquiavelismo' (Paz 1993a: 303). According to Paz, painters were the only exception to this rule as they exercised a degree of intellectual freedom. 'The Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors' aimed to 'socializar el arte. Destruir el individualismo burgués. Repudiar la pintura de caballete y cualquier otro arte salido de los círculos ultra-intelectuales y aristocráticos. Producir solamente obras monumentales que fueran del dominio público' (quoted in Suárez 1972: 40). The muralists' Syndicate addressed their public manifesto 'a los intelectuales que no estén envilecidos por la burguesía' (1989 [1923]: 323). Siqueiros echoed this sentiment when he distinguished the Mural Movement from the tradition of easel painting: 'our art is public, for the multitudes, and it speaks a different social language, with its own particular style and form' (1975 [1945]: 8). By the late 1930s, however, this revolutionary fervour had begun to dissipate. In 1937 Bertram Wolfe recorded the disillusionment of revolutionary promises:

The Revolution of 1910 is drawing to a close: not that its vaguely felt aims are fulfilled or the major causes of unrest removed, but because the situation is changing the initial drive has spent its force. (Wolfe 1937: 210)

This thesis demonstrates that colonial forces which existed within post-revolutionary racial thought resulted in many of the artistic products of the Mexican Mural Movement, which intended to be resistive, actually contributing to a reinforcement of hegemonic practices. These symbolic practices contributed to the mythologising surrounding the projected objectives of the revolution. As Florencia Mallon argues: 'Struggles over citizenship and liberty, attempts to expand and make real the universal promises of nationalism and democracy, can be understood as hegemonic processes' (1995: 9). Ilene V. O'Malley holds that the rhetoric of the Obregón government was born of the necessity 'to placate both right and left' and due to the particular factions contending in the post-revolutionary political arena, 'to maintain domestic legitimacy it had to assume a "revolutionary" posture rather than a centrist one' (1986:116).

The murals' relationship to hegemonic representation in the public sphere is multi-dimensional and the muralists acted, in part, as a conduit for numerous socio-historical forces. The argument of this thesis is framed within an exploration of Rivera's contribution to the cultural components of the mythmaking process involved in nation building. I sustain a particular focus on the role played by the Muralists' representations of the indigenous peoples of Mexico as a salient feature of post-revolutionary mythologising practices.

The Art of Myth

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes (1973) argues that every social language creates the historically and culturally specific myths which

sustain the hegemony of a particular culture.⁸ Such language is therefore created within the boundaries of an intellectual paradigm which is made to appear seamlessly 'natural'. Each discursive utterance exists within the limits of its own socio-cultural context and is both created by and creator of social myth. Barthes names these cultural myths *mythologies* and claims that they collectively make up a socially circumscribed reality. In the light of Barthes statement that 'myth is a type of speech' (1973: 117), the 'freedom' and 'different social language' that Siqueiros claimed for the Mexican Mural Movement can be regarded as integrally bound by the socio-cultural conditions into which it was born. The muralists, in part, may be regarded as a conduit through which the social forces and social mythology of post-revolutionary nation building were channelled. Thomas Benjamin states that '[t]he Revolution with a capital letter [was represented as] commendable and justified, almighty and all-encompassing' (2000: 13). During the two decades preceding 1929 'scribblers, journalists, politicians, intellectuals, propagandists, and other insurgent spokesmen and women throughout Mexico, the so-called *voceros de la Revolución*, had invented and constructed the Revolution with a capital letter in their pamphlets, broadsides, proclamations, histories, articles, and editorials' (Benjamin 2000: 13). According to Benjamin the voices and visions of the muralists had become some of the strongest public statements of the post-revolutionary period; they 'had been influenced by the *voceros de la Revolución* and through their art had joined their ranks' (2000: 75).

⁸ O'Malley also makes connections between Roland Barthes and the *mythologies* of the Mexican Revolution (1986: 125-127).

Investigations into the 'Myth of the Revolution' during the post-revolutionary period, when the murals were painted, and the role of depictions of indigenous peoples within the mythmaking process are key components of this thesis. This Myth of the Revolution, 'with a capital letter', is, as Benjamin (2000) reminds us, still part of Mexico's national, cultural identity. Revolution Day, November 20, 'is one of Mexico's most patriotic festivals' and has become 'an instrument of civic education' (2000: 99). The murals played a significant part in the 'education' of the Mexican public during the post-revolutionary years. The first murals were part of an extensive governmental programme. As Alan Knight (2002) points out, education was a major force in the creation of the centralising state and essential in the secularisation and assimilation of diverse factions of Mexican society. The integral function of education in post-revolutionary nation building can be strongly linked to the Muralist Movement. Shifra M. Goldman suggests that one of the chief aims of the Mexican Mural Movement was 'to teach the history of Mexico from the Conquest to Independence' (1982:111). She also observes that '[s]ince the muralists undertook to address a mass, largely illiterate audience in the 1920s, they chose a realistic style (often narrative), that would serve, as in the Renaissance, like "a painted book" ' (1982: 111). Goldman also argues that one of the main roles of this movement was 'educative: to convey information about the pre-Columbian heritage (in the 1920's, a new and revolutionary concept)' (1982: 111). This thesis, however, contends that the genealogy of such supposedly 'new' racial formulations as the glorification of the Mesoamerican past, can be traced back at least as far as Mexican Independence in the 1820s.

The post-revolutionary Mural Movement, as I have mentioned, is frequently termed the Mexican Mural Renaissance, as it allegedly embodied a new philosophy and new innovative art forms, with which to celebrate the birth of an era. Revolutions by definition are believed to create deep social change. In Mexico diverse insurrectionary movements fought to gain dominance and the victors eventually formed the post-revolutionary Mexican State. The victorious Sonoran government had to live up to the expectations of dissimilar social factions with contradictory goals, in order to prevent further insurgency. Desmond Rochfort underlines the historical contingency of this supposed rebirth:

The development of Mexican muralism can be seen to grow out of a Mexican cultural renaissance, the roots of which were clearly present and developing before the Revolution. This was particularly evident in post-revolutionary racial theories. This 'renaissance' synthesised with the political revolution to form a unique relationship between a tide of radical national politics and a cultural rediscovery of national definition and identity that would in the end reach beyond the purely Mexican. (Rochfort 1993: 15)

The precise nature of these roots has been defined differently by various commentators. Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser suggest that by using modernism for their own ends '[a]rtists in Mexico were seen to have challenged the authority of a Eurocentric aesthetic and asserted the values of a self-consciously post-colonial culture' (1989:

80). Ana María Alonso (2004) contends that the Mexican Cultural Revolution was both an explicitly anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movement. These views resonate with the frequently expressed belief that the muralists addressed the counter-hegemonic concerns of the Mexican subaltern and gave a voice to indigenous groups. Goldman argues that the Mural Movement 'was clearly an art of advocacy, and in many cases it was intended to change consciousness and promote political action' (1982:111). The 'Indian' population who had previously been silenced would allegedly be integrated into the post-revolutionary state through consent rather than coercion. Baddeley and Fraser affirm that the muralists displayed a 'heightened awareness' and were openly 'among the first Latin American artists to refer not just to the outward symbols of the prehispanic past but also to the overall aesthetic of indigenous culture' (1989: 80). These observations, however, fail to consider the fact that 'ideas themselves—relating to racial equality or inequality—are embedded deep in social relations [and] may rarely be overtly expressed, and indeed, may be deliberately disguised or disingenuously denied' (Knight 1990: 71). This thesis argues that consequently, the 'representation' of the indigenous in the post-revolutionary years, contained internal contradictions and often created a seeming representation which, by its very presence, obscured the facts whilst simultaneously appearing to reveal them. Various socio-political forces contributed to the creation of culturally-specific *mythologies* creating images of the 'Indian' in the context of post-revolutionary Mexican nation building.

In 'The Rise and Fall of the Myth of the Mexican Revolution', Knight acknowledges the super-structural multiplicity of revolutionary

symbolism. He explains that a 'bundle of ideas, images, icons, slogans, and policies [...] became associated with the revolution and the regime to which it gave birth' (2002: 1). Knight also observes that 'over decades, the revolutionary regime became adept at mobilizing support - and silencing overt dissent - by means of subtle, and some not so subtle, clientelist practices' (2002:16). In order to gain a deep understanding of the overt and covert meanings of the Mexican Mural Movement, differing views of its aesthetic origins must be contextualised within the culturally-specific socio-historic situation. The precise social formations which gave birth to this form of public art must be acknowledged. Mallon observes the diverse components which comprise the imagined fictions which become social facts:

To decenter our analysis of nationalism, we might fruitfully begin with Benedict Anderson's image of the nation as an "imagined community." Imagining means to create by using one's mind; it involves cultural, political and intellectual construction. [...] Nationalism, in this sense, is a form of discourse - defined as the combination of intellectual and political practices that makes sense of events, objects and relationships. (1995: 5)

In *Historicising National Identity, or who Imagines What and When* Prasenjit Duara questions the fixity of Anderson's seminal theory in which 'the nation as a whole imagin[es] itself to be a unified subject of history' and argues that identification occurs 'simultaneously with

several communities that are all imagined' (1995: 153). Duara also observes that 'these identifications are historically changeable and often conflicted internally with each other' (1995: 153). The cultural specificity of a particular 'imagined community' and the complexity of its reception must therefore be considered for an accurate understanding of a particular process of nation building.

The fact that the murals were a public art form, making public statements, links them more strongly to the reception and creation of social forces than privatised, easel painting. According to Siqueiros, 'mural art cannot be judged on either a national or international scale by the canons of movable art, of easel painting, of painting in its function of private pleasure' (1975 [1945]: 8). The public and social nature of this art opened up a discursive space which was explicitly linked to the major social movements which crystallised, metamorphosed or were consciously created by the revolutionary state. The interacting socio-cultural dimensions created by political forces at this particular historical juncture, created a situation which was both complex and volatile.

Dawn Ades cites three major socio-historical forces which arguably enabled 'the dominance of the visual arts and the cultural primacy of muralism' between 1920 and 1940 (1989: 151). She suggests these formative aspects were: the influence of José Vasconcelos, who was the Secretary of Public Education (1921-24) in the government of President Alvaro Obregón, the 'fresh research' into the 'Indian Problem' sparked by the Revolution and the 'long tradition of mural projects in Mexico' (1989: 151-152). After the Mexican Revolution the 'Indian

Question’ (a reformulation of the conundrum of the ‘Indian Problem’)⁹ was developed due to changes in hegemonic objectives. In this thesis I argue that certain related, dynamically interacting socio-cultural forces contributed to the rise of the Mexican Mural Movement in the context of the mythmaking process of Mexican nationalism. Contrary to Ades, I argue that the influence of the mural tradition of Mexico, particularly on Diego Rivera, was minimal due to his fifteen-year European training and that his desire to create public art predates his visits to Italian and Mexican murals in 1921. In a newspaper interview in 1921, Rivera expresses his long-term aspiration to engage with the people’s art: ‘[...] in Paris, in Madrid, in Rome, in all of the countries I have visited [...] it was my wish to study popular art, the ruins of our great past, with the purpose of crystalizing certain ideas about art,... those that will give a new and broad essence to my work’ (Rivera quoted in Folgarait 1998: 22).

I would also suggest that four major socio-cultural elements influenced the emergence of the ‘Mexican Mural Renaissance’. These will be introduced briefly here and discussed in more depth later in this chapter:

Firstly, the most significant factor in the creation of the murals was the Revolution itself and the post-revolutionary governmental imperative to create a unified image of Mexican national identity for a largely illiterate poor. The ‘Myth of the Mexican Revolution’ was integral to this post-revolutionary governmental image.

⁹ The ‘Indian Question’ will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Secondly, although it is clear that the movement can be classed as beginning with the first commissions by Vasconcelos, I regard him as acting as a catalyst for certain aspects of educational thought which coincided in the post-revolutionary period but had been developed previously and were integral to the process of nation building in Mexico. Out of the chaotic debris of the 1910-1917 revolutionary events, Alvaro Obregón's presidency (1920-1924) reconstructed the foundations of Mexico's political system. During his term men were strategically ordered to administer the rebuilding of various sectors of the economy with the aim of promoting national unity. Despite flamboyant revolutionary rhetoric in the period of post-revolutionary reconstruction, Obregón and Calles trampled on many of the revolutionary principles throughout their terms in office. Both *caudillos* attempted to forge a national consciousness and construct a Mexican memory that would serve the image they wished to project. The first bold enterprise which celebrated the triumphs of the revolutionary genealogy was the 1921 centennial celebrations for independence. The government made an expensive effort to commemorate this occasion and to emphasise the elements of national unity, native roots, revolutionary origins and *mestizo* racial fusion. As Benjamin (2000) points out, the role of religion was superseded and downplayed in this ritual creation of national memory and the Calles regime emphasised the rhetoric of the ongoing nature of the revolution and took official responsibility for commemorating la Revolución of past, present and future. Calles attempted to project an image of the unification of all revolutionaries in an attempt to ideologically solder together the diverse factions of Mexican society.

As Paz has stated, the process of educational policy-making grew out of revolutionary theory which was rooted in thought of the pre-revolutionary decades and required the correct catalyst and socio-political conditions in order to come to fruition: 'El movimiento educativo poseía un carácter orgánico. [...] Fue una obra social, pero que exigía la presencia de un espíritu capaz de encenderse y de encender a los demás' (Paz 1993a: 297). It must be noted that in the post-revolutionary decades the political climate was changeable. President Cárdenas controlled the fate of Mexican history from 1934-1940. His name is regarded by many as synonymous with a 'reconquest of Mexico'; a heroic figure who dispelled the shadow of the regressive regimes of Obregón and Calles. The President's uncompromising attitude earned him a place in the historical pantheon alongside Hidalgo, Morelos, Juárez and Madero (Markiewicz 1993).

Thirdly, the dynamic interactions between art, anthropology and archaeology caused developments within the field of *indigenismo* which had a significant impact on intellectual life in post-revolutionary Mexico. Paz describes 'the other Mexico' as an integral part of Mexican identity:

Es posible que la expresión 'el otro México' carezca de precisión, pero la verdad es que no he encontrado ninguna otra más a propósito. Con ella pretendo designar a esa realidad gaseosa que forman las creencias, fragmentos de creencias, imágenes y conceptos que la historia deposita en el subsuelo de la psiquis social, esa cueva o sótano en

continua somnolencia y, asimismo, en perpetua fermentación. (Paz 1993a: 389)

Finally, the muralists' own varied responses to Mexico's historico-political situation since 'independence' resulted in wide-ranging, often contradictory aesthetic and political objectives. The artists' responses were multifaceted and, although the Mural Movement is seen as a unified entity with common goals, as is often the case with artistic movements, hybrid art forms with diverse objectives were created. As this thesis focuses on the representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, I have selected the muralists' varying relationship to *indigenismo* as exemplary of variations between the muralists in the context of post-revolutionary nation building. The varied relationships between *indigenista* cultural politics and *los tres grandes* will be explored in Chapter Two of the thesis.

In this chapter, I will consider each of the factors contributing to the formation of the murals. I explore the specific contours of the cultural landscape within which the Mexican Muralists' created their public works. The socio-historical investigation of the post-revolutionary juncture will contextualise the analysis of the Mexican Muralists' contrasting representations of the indigenous which follows.

'The Meaning of the Mexican Revolution'

It is important to outline the political backdrop which enabled the Mexican Mural Movement to exist. Anita Brenner, an art critic in Mexico in the post-revolutionary period who knew the artists personally, wrote how:

...[t]he painters got contracts for murals at plasterers' rates, from the Minister of Education, and swaggered in overalls up splintery scaffolds to put the meaning of the revolution, thrice human size, on public walls.
(Brenner 1971 [1929]: 65)

What was the alleged 'meaning of the revolution' that Brenner asserts was so powerfully illustrated by the muralists under the gaze of Mexico's public eye? The question has diverse implications and must be asked in the context of understanding a vast array of problematical historical processes. The various, wide-ranging theoretical perspectives from which the enquiry may be undertaken, have created conflicting views and interpretations of the process of 'revolutionary events'. A consensus on the 'meaning of the revolution' has never been reached. In this section I outline some theories of the underlying causes of the insurrection.

The direct cause of this political eruption was complex, and certain factions of Mexican society were armed and volatile since many lives had become intolerable and state institutions and practices of the Presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876 – 1911), known as the Porfiriato, were clearly not serving their interests. Under President Díaz class and state structures were replete with colonial legacies and favoured foreign investment to suit the demands of international capitalism. Although Díaz attempted to rule under the auspices of the liberal constitution that Juárez had fought so long to establish after independence, the Porfiriato became synonymous with despotism

(Kirkwood 2000: 114). In certain regions, under the hacienda system which absorbed local lands into big estates, there was widespread exploitation of estate workers which reached near-slavery. This led to impoverishment and landlessness amongst the indigenous as well as the breaking of ancient traditions.

The Tripartite Revolution

Knight (1985) has pointed out the interpretive complexities of analysing the successes and failures of the transformative progress of a revolution which may be subject to a myriad a priori and radically differing assumptions. The scope of this chapter can only include a representative example of these perspectives. Knight assesses the array of theoretical approaches to the Mexican revolution, ranging from Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, who demotes the Mexican Revolution to the status of a 'Great Rebellion', to an argument at the other end of the interpretive spectrum which asserts that the series of events in this period of Mexican history resulted in not only one but in three simultaneous revolutions (Fuentes cited in Craven 2002). The latter argument contains elements of reductionism but serves well to disentangle three of the main factions within the revolutionary period.

The first of these 'three revolutions' was the agrarian uprising led by Emiliano Zapata (1879 – 1919) and to a less focussed extent Pancho Villa (1878 – 1923). The goal of this revolution was inspired by land distribution structures such as the ejido, a communally farmed

plot of land. Zapata declared to the Sonoran revolutionaries 'I'll disband my boys as soon as the land is divided. What are you going to do?' (Leighton 1971: 209). The anarchist strategy of Ricardo Flores Magón from 1916 was in accord with Zapata's mission. In one extract from his essays in the pamphlet *Relatos Libertarios* entitled El sueño de Pedro 'Pedro duerme y sueña', Flores Magón writes:

Se sueña en un amplio campo, donde se encuentran miles de compañeros trabajando la tierra, mientras de sus gargantas brotan las notas triunfales de un himno al Trabajo y a la Libertad. (1916: 17)

The agrarian reform values enshrined in article 27¹⁰ were built from the foundations of Zapata's Plan. The land reform proposals in the famed Plan de Ayala led to land redistribution programmes of the 1920s and 1930s and linked Zapata to President Cárdenas due to this president's extensive redistribution of land. The agrarian revolt preferred the communitarian solutions of the rural classes and despised the Eurocentrism of Díaz. Integral to Zapata's revolution were the emancipation and rights of indigenous peasants. Craven notes how this branch of the Mexican Revolution was favoured by 'ultra-leftist' Rivera who depicted Zapata over forty times (2002: 59).

The Second Revolution, in Fuentes's interpretation, was in the tradition of the anti-colonial movement led by Benito Juárez and guided by liberals from the hacienda class such as Francisco Madero

¹⁰ Article 27 restricted foreign ownership of land and called for agrarian redistribution.

(1873–1913) and Venustiano Carranza (1859–1970) or the middle-class revolutionaries such as Presidents Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928). This movement aimed to create a modern centralised state which favoured collectivisation at the same time as encouraging private prosperity in order to allow Mexico to build a major place on the international stage. Orozco and Siqueiros had both fought with Carranza's Constitutional Army and had sympathy for this faction of the revolution (Craven, 2002: 59). However, the political stances of the Muralists changed over time. Later Siqueiros became more radical and Orozco less political, as this thesis illustrates through their works.

The 'Third Revolution' emerged from a base of urban factory workers initially inspired by the anarchism of the Flores Magón brothers. The movement grew in strength and was transposed into the *Casa del Obrero Mundial* (House of World Workers) in agreement with Obregón. The urban working class were later led by Luis Morones who, in 1918, founded the *Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos* (Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers, CROM) under state control. Later in the 1930's, Marxist Vicente Lombardo Toledano led a radical labour movement which was eventually usurped by an umbrella of labour unions known collectively as the *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos* (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM). Another branch of the labour movement, was founded in 1911 as the Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero*, PSO). The PSO changed its name to the Mexican Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Mexicano*, PCM) in November 1919 after the Russian Bolshevik Revolution. As the PCM was illegal from 1925 until 1935, during the

presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas the party never really gained mass support but had an influence in the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) and among the intelligentsia of Mexico City, amongst whom were many artists including Rivera and Siqueiros.

The Aftermath of the Revolution

Following the Revolution, changes in class formation allowed new types of capitalist production, internal migration, and the need to assimilate rural communities and new groups of urban poor into the socio-cultural structure of the nation state. It was necessary to create a definite new image of a present strongly distinct from the past. The supposed 'new' nation would be composed of fresh identities in which the revolutionary present would be the beneficent creator of future possibilities which integrated the needs of all social and racial groups. The agrarian reform act of 1915 and the Constitution of 1917 sowed the seeds for Mexican land reform. However, as Cumberland (1972) points out, writing an intricate legal article for the purpose of constructing an innovative land tenure organization revealed itself to be much easier than actually distributing land in the chaotic devastation of the aftermath of a revolution. In reality, the governments from 1911-1934 did enact some land reforms but these fell short of the demands of the agrarian faction of the revolution. Government officials had strongly divergent ideas about what constituted land reorganization. The constitution recommended land redistribution in terms of *ejidos*. The *hacendados* were unsurprisingly uncooperative, including Carranza himself who was a successful medium-sized landholder. Due to antagonism, apathy or indifference

there was only meagre redistribution during the presidencies of Obregón and Calles and the *Maximato*.¹¹ The *ejido* emerged in this period as an acceptable form of land redistribution. President Calles described the *ejido* as a school from which the *ejiditarios* would graduate as private farmers. Calles believed agrarian reform to be doomed to failure and the sure road to disaster through 'creating pretensions and encouraging indolence' (Calles quoted in Markiewicz 1993: 59). He distributed only eight million acres during his presidency. It was during the Cárdenas years (1934-1940) that the most extensive programme for land distribution was enforced and the seeds sown by the *Constitution* came to fruition. Cárdenas favoured the *ejido* as a permanent factor in agricultural development and during his six-year term in office he redistributed more than fifty million acres of privately owned land, which was more than double the amount recorded since the end of the Revolution (Craven 2002: 26).

The agrarian revolutionaries, however, felt betrayed in the post-revolutionary period, as they considered the reforms to be tokenistic changes which did not address their needs seriously. A clear statement of this disapproval was made at the Aguascalientes Convention when Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama, refused to sign the Mexican flag along with the others at the convention stating 'we are going to expose the lie of history that is this flag' (Craven, 2002: 61). The socio-cultural role of the flag in the creation of the nationalism of everyday life, that Michael Billig (1995) describes as *banal nationalism*,

¹¹ The *Maximato* was the period between 1929 and 1934 when Calles had remained the *caudillo* of Mexico, 'el Jefe Máximo' (the supreme chief), who ruled behind the mask of three puppet presidents.

will be discussed in the final chapter of the thesis in relation to the Mexican murals.

What was the function of the Mexican muralists vis-à-vis these divergent political movements which became collectively known as the Mexican Revolution and, in turn, what part did the representation of the indigenous play within the image of the Revolution created by the muralists? This question can be partially answered by considering the political imperatives of the post-revolutionary Mexican government. President Obregón was faced with:

[...] a conundrum: How to convince his compatriots that a profound revolution had taken place even though he was unable to offer them immediate material satisfaction [...] in the meantime, inculcating a new nationalism and a sense of pride in the Revolution would have to substitute for action.
(Kandell 1988: 443)

Wolfe describes this dilemma and the salient role of the Mexican Muralists in the creation of a national image:

The revolution had promised so much: now the “Government of the Revolution” had to deliver something on account of its promises [...] insignificant from the standpoint of the real needs of the masses, it was nevertheless more than sufficient to occupy all the artists whose social and plastic vision led them to paint frescoes.
(1939: 160)

Hennessy notes the longevity of this governmental image by suggesting that later the muralists played a critical part in contributing towards the cultural hegemony of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) which greatly aided the political stability of the government for over fifty years. He also notes that the 'imagery has since become an integral component of every Mexican's cultural baggage' (Hennessy, 1991: 685). This interpretation, although credible, leaves many questions unanswered. How did the muralists become a contributing force in the post-revolutionary mythology of nation building? What place did the Mexican people have in this image? What part did the indigenous play in the depiction of the Mexican nation and the vision of a united people?

Nicola Miller (1999) describes the ambiguous role of the intellectuals during the post-revolutionary years. She holds that the Mexican governments of the post-revolutionary decades 'systematically misappropriated and bowdlerized the ideas of independent intellectuals in order to promote a crude cultural nationalism which was precisely the opposite of what the intellectuals themselves advocated' (Miller 1999: 151). She explains that radical intellectual force was contained by various strategies and that by the 1930s the 'by-then-prevalent role for the Spanish-American intellectual [was...] architect of the nation' (Miller 1999: 151). Miller goes on to explain the unwitting complicity of intellectuals in this process of deradicalisation which will be explored later in Chapters Three to Five.

To undertake a comprehensive investigation of the murals themselves in the revolutionary context, I will now go on to discuss the

dynamically interacting spheres of philosophy, politics, archaeology and anthropology in the Mexico of the period, 1920-1935. In the post-revolutionary period officials of the revolutionary state apparatus were aware of the possibility of Indian uprisings and resistance to state intervention. They were concerned with providing the historical foundations for a nation-state that identified the leading elements of society as white or *mestizo* and relegated its Indian legacy to pre-Hispanic times revealed by ongoing archaeological investigations.

Three noteworthy examples of racial theorists are Manuel Gamio (1883 -1960), and later Alfonso Caso (1896-1970) and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1908-1996).¹² These intellectuals were industrious and versatile writers as well as distinguished, energetic activists; all followed some of the varied tenets of *indigenismo* with the exception of Vasconcelos, who cultivated a theosophical brand of Hispanophile *mestizaje* (hybridity). The new leaders of the post-revolutionary government established in 1920 were aware that intellectuals had been influential in the events leading up to the removal of Díaz. What also soon transpired was that the Sonoran state (1920-24) saw itself as the sole arbiter of competing interests and as an incontrovertible power which would not tolerate challenge from any sector of society.

¹² It is important to note the work of these theorists although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss them at length. Alfonso Caso was both archaeologist and *indigenista* and the excavator of Monte Albán. He was director of the National Museum, 1933-1934, of the National Preparatory School in 1938, of the National Institute of Anthropology and History, 1939-1944; and rector of the National University, 1944-1945. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán was a physician, the Director of *Indigenista* Affairs in the *Secretaría de Educación Pública*, (1946-1952), the federal deputy of Veracruz, (1961-1964) and the director general of the National Indigenista Institute (1971 – 1972) (Knight 1990: 102).

In order to tackle the 'Indian Problem', the post-revolutionary government institutionalised a political project for the Indian villages. The 'Indian Question' was formulated and correlated with a theoretical foundation for reconstructing and unifying the nation. Philosophers, writers and politicians were important in articulating racial theories about the 'Indian' in post-revolutionary Mexico. Miller describes how two decades after the 1920s the Mexican state managed 'to contain the intellectual community by means of the universities' (1999: 49). During the period of the 1920s-1940s 'governments pursued a policy of divide-and-rule towards intellectuals. One technique adopted was to marginalise the traditionally central figure of the writer in favour of anthropologists and artists' (1999: 49). Miller however points out that Calles 'was dedicated to the elimination of opposition to the urban, industrial literate nation-state he was determined to build' (1999:146). From this argument the idea of artists being the most pliable of intellectual forces can be extrapolated. During the rule of Calles and the Maximato:

[...] intellectuals were welcomed if they chose to collaborate as technicians, but were rapidly marginalized if they tried to promote themselves as technocrats or to venture any public criticism of policy.
(Miller 1999: 146)

In the following sections I illustrate the significant cultural and political roles played by Vasconcelos and *mestizaje* and Gamio and

indigenismo in the process of defining the indigenous peoples of Mexico in the mythology of post-revolutionary nation building.

Vasconcelos, Cultural Nationalism and Education

With the appointment in 1921 of José Vasconcelos as Obregón's minister of public education, the broad, democratising vision of education that he put into effect, and the hefty budget that was assigned to this area, the conception and visual materialisation of "Mexicaness" received a decisive impulse, a fact that is largely responsible for the identification of this year as a turning point in Mexican culture. (Cordero Reiman 1993: 19)

Vasconcelos (fig 1.1) was born in 1881 and died in 1959, when 'there ended the life of a man who had already become a legend in his native Mexico' (de Beer 1966: iii). As Cordero Reiman states in the above quotation, Vasconcelos had significant influence on the socio-cultural aspects of the creation of a Mexican national identity. As Secretary of Public Education in Obregón's government (1921-1924), he was celebrated for advancing Mexico's educational system and constructing the foundations for a comprehensive public system across the nation. As well as being a philosopher, revolutionary intellectual and political activist, he was also director of the National University and later director of the *Biblioteca de México* from 1940. Anne Doremus claims that Vasconcelos began the Mexican 'cultural renaissance by promoting the arts' (2001a: 19).

It is clear that without Vasconcelos as a precipitating factor, the Mexican Mural Movement would not have existed. Ades describes him as ‘the first enabler’ who surrendered the walls of the National Preparatory School ‘[...]to an extremely young and turbulent group of artists, whom he plucked from the art schools and studios, or, in the case of the more mature Rivera and Siqueiros, lured back from Europe’ (1989: 152). Vasconcelos certainly had insight into the power of art and its ability to engage the public emotionally, which in turn would forcefully communicate the ‘voice’ of the Revolution. In issue number one of the *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública* published in 1921, Vasconcelos was described as ‘an energetic man deeply in love with his patria...who well knows the forces latent in his country’, and he was credited with having ‘had flair enough to recognize [...] the champions of a new art’ (Michel 1923 quoted in Charlot 1963: 117). The commissioning of the Mexican muralists was part of a much wider educational project which Vasconcelos describes through lofty ideals:

The elevators and educators of our race must come to realize that the principal aim of education is to form men capable of utilizing their surplus energies for the benefit of others. (quoted in Folgarait 1998: 17)

Vasconcelos was, however, also in part a conduit for post-revolutionary socio-cultural forces. Franco observes that the first muralist project was part of Vasconcelos’s role as ‘[o]ne of the architects of Mexican cultural nationalism’ (1967: 72). In his period of

office as Secretary of Public Education he ‘implemented a far-reaching programme that transformed educational and cultural life’ (Franco 1967: 72). Through his diverse policies the super-structural elements of nationalism reached out into the interstitial spaces of society. The pedagogic programme put forward by Vasconcelos included the dissemination of Western literary and musical classics, the construction of rural schools and the opening of public libraries. Obregón increased annual federal spending on education from around five million to fifty-five million dollars. During his presidency (1920–1924) the government built one thousand new rural schools and two thousand new public libraries. The post-revolutionary chaos which the Obregón government had inherited did not prevent the elevation of the national rate of literacy from 15 to 25 percent. This latter figure would be doubled again by the end of the Cárdenas administration (Craven 2002: 34). Another example of the scope of Vasconcelos’s educational project can be seen in the fact that ‘between 1921 and 1923 he increased by over 50% the number of buildings, teachers and students of official primary schools’ (Blanco quoted in Doremus 2001a:19).

Indigenista projects also influenced schooling particularly in rural areas. The problematic premises upon which these educational projects were based will be discussed in the following section and with application to both *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* in the components of the murals. The subject matter of the new art project was a form of Mexican nationalism to which *indigenismo* was integral. Edwin Williamson notes that the Minister of Education otherwise known as ‘the “caudillo of culture”’, became the patron of painters such as Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco, commissioning them to paint frescoes on the

walls of government and public buildings depicting revolutionary and indigenous subjects' (Williamson 1992: 393).

The artists' remit was to produce vast quantities of painted surfaces using themes that were 'suitably revolutionary' although they were left to their own devices in terms of subject nuance and style. The images sent out messages legitimizing the 'progressive' nationalism of the revolution to both the literate and the vast population of illiterate masses. Monsiváis, notes that 'Para Vasconcelos, la verdadera revolución es algo muy distinto al estallido de batallas y saqueos, es un retorno de la conducta civilizada de las metas del Espíritu' (1986: 118).

Certain commentators suggest that the Minister's philosophy was not as revolutionary as is often believed and contained some strongly 'conservative' elements. Craven concedes both the 'wonderfully visionary quality of Vasconcelos's leadership' from 1921-1924 but also the decline in his influence and the 'limitations' of his pedagogical perspective which he describes as an 'amalgam of the following: a Neoplatonism filtered through Masonic theosophy, a middle-of-the-road socialist pluralism in keeping with the example of Lunacharsky, a predilection for anodyne Art Deco classicism, and an admiration for the patriarchal approach of Spanish colonial missionaries' (2002: 31).¹³ Franco adds another dimension to Craven's critique of Vasconcelos's philosophy when she observes that his theory of social

¹³ Theosophy is a series of religious beliefs 'which were relatively widespread in modern artistic circles around the turn of the century: that there is a qualitative hierarchy in human experience' to which both Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) were attracted (Harrison and Wood 1992: 86). Theosophy regards works of art to have an essential spiritual function, 'and that this value is a function of art's autonomy with respect to naturalistic appearances' (Harrison and Wood 1992: 86).

evolution was based on the idea that, humanity progressed through a series of stages—‘a materialist stage, an intellectual or rationalist phase and an aesthetic phase’, which explains the Minister’s strong support of artistic activity (1967: 72). Vasconcelos’s theosophical perspective led to his view that the struggle was a cultural war which would inspire, civilise and educate the Mexican people through raising them to the elevated spiritual state of the aesthetic dimension which in this case translated to the Eurocentrism of ‘the best’ of the Western cultural canon. Miller describes how:

[...] as Secretary of Education, he summoned his old colleague from the Ateneo, Diego Rivera, back from Europe to decorate the walls of the National Preparatory School (ENP) with what the Education Minister had envisaged as the secular equivalent of devotional paintings, intended to diffuse a sense of spirituality and classical harmony (civilisation) among the barbarous (illiterate). ¹⁴ (1999: 49)

Other commentators have described the first murals commissioned by Vasconcelos such as Rivera’s *Creation* (1922) in the National Preparatory School as promoting a ‘conservative’ visual aesthetic (Folgarait 1998). However, as we shall see in Chapter Four, Rivera himself was a member of an esoteric, Rosicrucian order in the early 1920s although he reconciled these beliefs with Marxist tenets. Speaking of Rivera, however, Domínguez Michael points out that

¹⁴ Ironically, the National Preparatory School was the most prestigious school in Mexico.

although Vasconcelos ‘asked him for racial and cosmogonic allegories... Diego painted the sickle and the machete’ (quoted in Miller 1999: 49). Williamson asserts that the fact that some of the muralists were Marxist ‘was of no great concern to the Mexican government [...] so long as their themes were appropriately ‘revolutionary’, the actual nuances of ideology could be left for the painters to fight over’ (1992: 393). State patronage was directed at individual painters rather than through the syndicate (Hennessey 1991: 689).

The muralists and their patron did not always see eye to eye. Charlot recounts that ‘[t]he Syndicate followed its chartered course faithfully. It failed only on one point: [...] it lacked the threat of strike [...] The one-man market for our mural wares was José Vasconcelos, and the Secretary was not impressed’ (1963: 244). Rivera’s biographer Bertram Wolfe recorded how Vasconcelos ‘was opposed to the turn the painters were taking, and no less to the propaganda content that began to show in Rivera’s murals’ (1939: 179). Vasconcelos’s memoirs disclose his attitude towards the collective action expressed by the painters:

[...] it had always seemed to me that the intellectual who has recourse to these methods does so because he feels himself individually weak. Art is individual and only the mediocre support them in the gregariousness of associations which are all right to defend the salary of the worker who can easily be replaced, never for the unsubstitutable work of the artist. (quoted in Wolfe 1939: 180)

Similarly, the muralists were not uncritical of Vasconcelos. Rivera openly satirises such ‘intellectuals’ on the third level of the Secretariat of Public Education in a panel entitled ironically *The Learned* (*los sabios*), (fig 1.2). According to Franco, this panel lampoons Vasconcelos for his elitist exoticism by placing him amongst the ‘false mystifiers’ whose knowledge proves ‘useless’ in the face of class struggle (1967: 76). In the satirical portrait Vasconcelos has his back to the people who view the mural and he sits on an elephant symbolising an insular, universalising Orientalist exoticism.

Despite these differences between the artists and their patron, there was a distinct continuity between certain Nationalist aspects of the representation of the people of Mexico through Vasconcelos’s writings and the work of the Mexican muralists as they both played a crucial role in the initiation and development of cultural nationalism which was inextricable from the building of the post-revolutionary nation state. The flexible intellectual Vasconcelos operated in a continually shifting philosophical nexus and later he denounced his theory of the ‘cosmic race’, describing it as: ‘perhaps one of my most notorious mistakes’ (quoted in Miller 1999: 143). The ‘multicultural’ revolutionary image presented by Vasconcelos was in fact philosophically rooted in theories of the Mexican people. Vasconcelos describes the Eurocentism of Rivera’s artistic education in terms of his need to know Mexico:

[...] he was a Frenchified artist who knew nothing of his own country. To put him in contact with Mexican reality and in

order that he learn to know the Indian, I sent him to Tehuantepec [Vasconcelos's birthplace] where he spent several months. On his return I consigned him the decoration of the Preparatoria. (quoted in Folgarait 1998: 38)

The Minister's interest in the theme of what it was to be Mexican, can be traced back to many years before. In his youth he had been deeply involved in the *Ateneo de la juventud*, a debating society which was founded by a group of young intellectuals in 1909 and came to include sixty members amongst whom was Diego Rivera. Members of the *Ateneo* had earlier published the short-lived journal *Savia moderna* which sponsored an art exhibition that for the first time exhibited works by Rivera and the aspiring Mexican artists Ponce de León and Francisco de la Torre (de Beer 1966: 18). The main interests of the *Ateneo* included ideas surrounding 'lo mexicano', education and 'Mexico's spiritual and political renewal' and one of its major philosophical cornerstones was 'Mexico's indigenous population' (Doremus 2001a: 35). Other key philosophical themes of the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, which can be clearly seen later in Vasconcelos's post-revolutionary educational project, included 'a strong belief in education of the masses as a means for creating a more just society [...] an admiration of classical art, [...] the promotion of cultural nationalism' as well as a denunciation of the restrictions of a positivist education (Doremus 2001a: 35).¹⁵

¹⁵ Positivism was an intellectual doctrine of the liberal bourgeoisie expounded by the French philosopher Auguste Comte. He re-interpreted the revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality as 'liberty to serve order and equality based on social hierarchy whose positions were won through work' and put faith in science which replaced theological discourses (de Beer 1966:

According to Alonso, the post-revolutionary ‘mythohistory of mestizaje’ supposedly ‘inverted ideas of purity and revaluated racial mixture’ (2004: 462). She goes on to say that this progressive inversion ‘became the basis of a new nationalist project’ (2004: 462). This interpretation is in accord with the received view but reduces the complexity of the debate in which the discursive distance between previous biologically determinist theories and the ‘new’ theories of *mestizaje* was not so great as is commonly believed. Notwithstanding the fusion of intellectual and artistic forces, the reality of racial equality or revolutionary transformation in material terms was a far slower process than revolutionary rhetoric claimed. However, the hypothesis of the hybrid race can be regarded as an inversion of previous insidious theories of racial ‘purity’ which post-revolutionary *indigenismo* can be credited with silencing (Knight 1990). Both Vasconcelos’s theories of hybridity and those of *indigenismo* can be seen as historically contingent and rooted in colonial thought. I will now discuss some of these basic contradictions which will become more apparent when they are discussed in application to the depictions of the indigenous peoples of Mexico in the Murals.

The legacy of the *Ateneo* can be seen in Vasconcelos’s influential works *La raza cósmica* (1925), *Aspects of Mexican Civilisation* (1926), *Indología* (1926) and *Prometeo vencedor* (1930), which all considered questions of race. The Minister of Education was the most renowned propagator of the idea of *mestizaje* in post-revolutionary Mexico. But

10-11). Positivism was the ideological framework used to rationalise the long presidency of Porfirio Díaz and his political advisors were aptly named *Científicos*.

he cannot be described as an *indigenista* in the sense of promoting the culture of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Miller observes the clashes of Vasconcelos's universalising philosophy which posited a 'Latin American race' within a socio-political context which was advocating Mexican nationalism. Miller explains that in some senses Vasconcelos critiqued nationalism, as he was dealing with larger racial issues: 'the main dualism that preoccupied him was not indigenous versus European, but Anglo-Saxon versus Ibero-American' (1999: 143). Vasconcelos was the most renowned propagator of the philosophy *mestizaje* with his famed text *La raza cósmica* (1925). He asserted that a new hybrid race would prevail internationally resulting in: 'la creación de una raza hecha con el tesoro de todas las anteriores, la raza final, la raza cósmica' (Vasconcelos 1961: 63). The 'cosmic race' was a 'universal race' a hybrid 'multicultural' mix which involved the blood of other races, yet, through a social-Darwinist model of a hierarchy of being, would result in the prevalence of the 'superior' Latin-American 'race'. The 'cosmic race' was to forge material, intellectual and aesthetic qualities, implicit in each race, towards a future of international equality. Vasconcelos's philosophy of cultural mixing contained strong internal contradictions as did many of the *indigenista* theories I discuss later in this chapter. For instance, in the theory of *La raza cósmica*, race was strictly categorised through a form of biological determinism. This was paradoxical in the sense that whilst expounding its progressive anti-racism, it was bound to deterministic theories which feed into racist ideologies. It combined a curious blend of theosophy and a form of Mendelism which explicitly advocated hybridity. Simultaneously the non-European was relegated

to a position of genetic inferiority which must be 'educated' to raise its standard (Vasconcelos 1926: 100). In a chapter of *Aspects of Mexican Civilisation* called 'The Race Problem', Vasconcelos argued for a 'survival of the fittest' type of Mendelism which contained strong shades of racial Eugenics as the 'uncivilised' races were destined to disappear through a form of genetic dilution: 'If we do not wish to be overwhelmed by the wave of the Negro, of the Indian, or of the Asiatic, we shall have to see that the Negro, the Indian, and the Asiatic are raised to the higher standards of life, where reproduction becomes regulated and quality predominates over numbers' (Vasconcelos 1926: 100-101). According to this philosophy, the 'Indian' was assumed to aspire to be assimilated into the highest expression of modern 'civilisation' which Vasconcelos believed to be embodied in the Latin American:

El indio no tenía otra puerta hacia el porvenir que la puerta de la cultura moderna, ni otro camino que el camino ya desbrozado de la civilización latina. (1961: 30)

Certain theorists have described Vasconcelos as 'a split personality' (de Beer 1966:127). De Beer describes the following words of Jesús Silva Herzog as 'typical' of these critics: 'La vida de Vasconcelos debe dividirse en dos épocas: Hasta 1929, y de 1930 adelante' (quoted in de Beer 1966: 127). The reason for this schism was thought 'to have occurred as a result of his loss of the presidential election of 1929 and subsequent exile. This traumatic experience is said to have left an indelible mark on the man, his work, his attitude and his outlook' (de Beer 1966: 127). Franco holds that this defeat had serious

consequences for dissenting voices as '1929 marks a new era in Mexican life, for thenceforward the intellectual was faced with aligning himself with the government, or working in isolation' (1967: 72). By this time, Vasconcelos's influence on the socio-cultural environment of the Mexican Mural movement was supplanted by other forces. José Manuel Puig Casauranc (1888-1939), who was Minister of Public Education 1930-1932, was significantly 'less tolerant of the radicalism of the mural painters than Vasconcelos was even at the end of his term of office' (Rochfort 1993: 48). True to the spirit of anti-radicalism which existed after 1929, Minister Puig issued an ultimatum to the muralists' Syndicate that they should cease publication of *El Machete*, which persistently attacked the state, or the government would suspend the painters' contracts (Rochfort 1993: 48). The challenge resulted in Siqueiros's contract being terminated and he responded by explaining the strong link between the radical press and the murals: 'If they snatch from us the walls of the public buildings, we have in the pages of *El Machete* movable walls for our great painting movement' (quoted in Rochfort 1993: 49). Puig agreed with Vasconcelos in his resentment towards the dissenting content of the murals.

Significantly, Puig also was of the same opinion as Vasconcelos that the best way to assimilate and homogenise Mexico's indigenous population was by way of a school system which would integrate students into modern 'civilisation' (Aguirre Beltrán 1992; Dawson 2004). Moisés Sáenz (1888-1941) succeeded Vasconcelos as Secretary of Public Education and in 1926 wrote a chapter entitled 'Integrating Mexico through Education' in *Some Mexican Problems* which explained:

In the House of the Indian Student, at Mexico City, the visitor may see pure Indians of many types speaking their own dialects and representing different stages of civilization and very different traits both mental and physical. (1926: 55)

One of the most pressing ‘Mexican Problems’ was the ‘Indian Problem’, otherwise known as the ‘Indian Question’. The imaginary solution to this problem is integral to understanding the paramount role played by *indigenismo* in the process of building the post-revolutionary nationalist *mythologies* in Mexico.

Anthropology, Art and the Indian Problem

Indigenismo is integral to the understanding of cultural identity and cultural property in Mexico, Guatemala and Peru, ‘where the most complex ancient American societies once flourished and where the greatest amount of ancient learning and culture was obliterated (Coggins 2002: 97). The historical roots of the ‘Indian Question’ stretched as far back as the conquest. The final section of this chapter, explains how the different cultural dimensions of art, archaeology and anthropology were integrally bound to the ‘Indian question’. The reformulation of this way of framing ‘problems’ about indigenous peoples, was forged through post-revolutionary Nationalism and historically specific forms of *indigenismo*. Patterson recalls the burning issues surrounding the ‘Indian Question’ in the period of revolutionary reconstruction:

Who were these armed, angry and potentially dangerous people? What was their place in the nation? What role should they play in the future? This was the Indian Question. (Patterson 1995: 69)

The borderlines of the question were initially deeply inscribed by colonial structures of Western thought and later by the limits of Western Enlightenment paradigms. Patterson reminds us that 'since the time of the Conquest the question had been framed by the ruling class and managed by agents of the state apparatus who, with their attempts to solve social issues, historicised and homogenised the interests of people with diverse understandings and experiences of everyday life (Patterson 1995: 70). The Indian question has passed through various stages of development in Mexico. During the Diaz dictatorship, when nationalism and positivism dominated education, history validated heroes and patriotism and archaeological monuments provided vivid testimony of the existence and achievements of the ancient civilisations in central and southern Mexico. Throughout the Porfiriato, anthropology was centred in the museum and its practitioners were mainly concerned with accumulating facts and objects (Knight 1990). Post-revolutionary *indigenismo* was less a compilation of supposedly 'factual' knowledge as it had been during the peak of Porfirian positivism, than a politically informed praxis (Knight 1990). Claudio Lomnitz asserts that there were marked differences between this approach to anthropology in which 'Porfirian anthropologists would use evolutionary theory as a frame for shaping Mexico's image' and that of post-revolutionary

anthropologists who 'would use it to intervene directly in native communities' (2001: 250).

A variety of figures were involved with racial questions in the post-revolutionary years and, as Knight (1990) has demonstrated, the field encompasses diverse practices in the name of championing the 'Indian'. Manuel Gamio (1883-1960) became Mexico's foremost anthropologist and archaeologist. He was the reluctant undersecretary of education in 1925 and the first director of the Interamerican Indigenista Institute (1942-1960) he was widely known in Mexico and the Continent as the founding father of modern *indigenismo*. For Gamio, Zapata's land programme had been a powerful force during the revolution. The example of Zapatismo shows how 'unlike creole nationalism, the nationalism of the revolution could not ignore the living Indian' (Bonfil Batalla 2001: 113).

Gamio, Caso and Aguirre Beltrán were all sincerely committed to social change and, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, are examples of racial theorists. I will concentrate on the work of Gamio as he is considered to be Mexico's first professional anthropologist. Gamio intended to use his knowledge and 'scientific' methodology to create concrete transformations in the lives of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Guillermo Zermeño underlines this stance by stating that 'for Gamio scientific anthropology had to be, above all, applied anthropology' (2001: 321). Gamio saw that the works of the past were constructive as 'sources of information,' as long as they were 'scientifically interpreted so that they can be used correctly'. He considered it reprehensible to investigate anthropological subjects without rigorous scientific methodology, and he criticised those who

did so ‘without even having the originality of the colonial chroniclers’ (Gamio quoted in Zermeño 2001: 321).

Understandings and misunderstandings of race and ethnicity are historically contingent and what is included in the ‘socially acceptable’ as well as what is excluded shifts with socio-historical change. Commentators have noted that, although a distinct advance on the explicit racism of the Porfiriato, post-revolutionary *indigenismo*, had elements within itself of that which it opposed (Brading 1988; Knight 1990; Zermeño 2001). Importantly, for the main focus of this thesis, Zermeño explains that the images presented through Gamio’s work could be manoeuvred to suit political ends: ‘Gamio did not realize that his own method and the object of his study were also subject to conditions of historicity [...] this method produced, by definition, an essential image of the Indian so that the latter could be manipulated in both time and space’ (2001: 321).

Revolutionary *indigenismo* was ostensibly of a different variety to previous attempts at Indian integration which involved coercion, violence and the desire to eliminate Indian culture, which was regarded as ‘inferior’. One of the cornerstones of Mexican revolutionary rhetoric is that it is strongly opposed to traditional Eurocentric racism. However, as the images shown later in this thesis attest, deeply rooted socio-psychical structures may be integral to supposedly radical images. It has been recognised that the progressive aspects of Mexican *indigenismo* were also historically contingent and were constituted by numerous colonial structures which subsumed the voice of the ‘Indians’ themselves presuming that integration into the ‘Modern Nation’ would raise them out of their pitiful ‘backwardness’

(Brading 1988; Zermeño 2001). In a section of *México Profundo* (1996) entitled 'The Redemption of the Indian through His Disappearance', Guillermo Bonfil Batalla¹⁶ describes the 'language, beliefs, habits and practices' of the Indian as largely segregating 'him from the new winds blowing in the world' and the fact that '[t]his closed world had to be opened wide and the Indian tossed into the complex turbulence of modern society' (Bonfil Batalla, 1996: 119). He points out that the 'ideology' of *indigenismo* was expressed in many ways in the artistic and cultural creation sponsored by revolutionary governments until 1940 (Bonfil Batalla 1996: 112). Post-revolutionary *indigenismo* therefore contained elements which substantiated colonial images of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, it 'represented another non-Indian formulation of the "Indian problem"; it was another white / "Mestizo" construct [...], part of a long tradition stretching back to the Conquest (Knight, 1990: 77). This misrepresentation contained durable images which continue to be manipulated. Referring to the 'official' statistics of the more contemporary Mexican government, Claude Batallion explains that '[t]odos estos métodos utilizan como criterio para definir la población indígena la práctica de una lengua indígena, criterio ciertamente muy elástico y fácilmente manipulado' (1988: 129). Zermeño affirms how, from the Conquest through to the anthropological investigations of the twentieth century, 'the indigenous world became part of a taxonomy and social order ruled by the science of anthropology' (2002: 326).

¹⁶ Bonfil Batalla was one of '[t]he *magníficos* [who] had had the daring to criticize that jewel in the crown of the Mexican Revolution that was *indigenista* anthropology' (Lomnitz 2001: 231).

A strongly significant example of this consolidation of the 'essential Indian' is the nomenclature used to classify indigenous peoples. Commentators have noted the irony in the fact that the 'authentic Mexicans', as the 'Indians' were named by Sahagún were displaced by the 'new Mexicans' or *criollos* and marginalised to be categorised as 'indigenous people' (Zermeño, 2002).¹⁷ The category of 'Indian' was in fact reinforced through *indigenismo* and its integral connection with the modernizing agenda of the *new* Nation state. Indians were categorised and defined by their physiology and physiognomy, geographical location, vulnerability and resistance to modernisation. *Indigenistas* depicted pre-Columbian societies as civilisations conquered by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century and portrayed contemporary 'Indians' as backward peasants with retarded learning capabilities. There was little acknowledgement of the rich diversity of indigenous peoples, except through a veneration of a marginalised, 'Indian' 'folk-culture'. From the perspective of these colonial worldviews, 'Indian' modes of thought and socio-religious understanding were considered to be deeply flawed and primitive. As Bonfil Batalla reminds us, every one of 'the Indian cultures of Mexico has a distinctive cultural profile that is the result of a particular cultural history whose beginnings date to remote times' (1996: 23).

¹⁷ Later in *Ulises Criollo* (1935) Vasconcelos showed an awareness of some of the colonial formulations which were integral to *indigenista* projects. In the volume of this autobiography entitled *El Desastre* (1938), he remarks on the similarities between the rural school teachers who were sent into remote areas as part of the Revolutionary initiative to educate and integrate the 'Indian' into the modern Revolutionary state and the intentions of Catholic colonial missionaries at the time of the conquest. This similarity of education imposed on the 'Indian' from outside, in the post-conquest and post-revolutionary years illustrates one aspect of the ideological roots of *indigenista* thought and the extent to which this philosophy is deeply rooted in Mexican historical race relations.

An example of this emphasis on the past glories of indigenous peoples can be found in the work of Gamio. He claimed that Mexico's indigenous cultures reached their highest levels of development before the conquest and that the customs of the various contemporary Indian cultures doomed them to ever increasing levels of poverty, impeded their integration into the mainstream *mestizo* culture and ultimately blocked the formation of a truly progressive national culture. Modernisation and rural education programmes directed by enlightened outsiders would be the vehicles for overcoming these obstacles. As head of the *Dirección de Antropología* in the Ministry of Agriculture between 1917 and 1925, Gamio carried out extensive studies at Teotihuacán in 1922, exploring and reconstructing its ancient architectural monuments and studying the ways of life its impoverished inhabitants, who scraped a livelihood on nearby haciendas. In his view, it was essential to study the rural Indian communities in order to rectify the problems of their 'backward' folk cultures. His plan of action involved education, confronting alcoholism and other social problems and introducing beekeeping and pottery to Teotihuacán. It did not extend to the inhabitant's petitions for land reform (Patterson 1995).

In Gamio's crucial earlier text *Forjando Patria* (1916), his solution to the 'Indian Problem', was partly argued with a relativism which followed that of his prestigious teacher Franz Boas (1858-1942). Gamio's work, however, contrary to cultural relativism, advocated assimilation of the indigenous population into the *mestizo* culture of a modernising state. Gamio followed Andrés Molina Enríquez, whose *Grandes problemas nacionales* (1909) diagnosed Mexico's ills through

the theoretical frame of European thinkers such as Comte, Spencer, Darwin, and Haekel and analysed Mexican society in terms of ethnic groups with a close correlation to social classes (Knight, 1990: 85).

Gamio's continuity with aspects of positivism represents the strong hegemonic strand which existed in post-revolutionary thought. In line with positivism, these liberal thinkers made the empiricist claim that knowledge is based exclusively on observable or experiential phenomena, and thus provided the foundations for essentialist understandings of the 'Indian'. Gamio's new formula for forging the fatherland therefore contained within its resistance elements of what it was resisting. As I stated earlier, this type of positivistic Nationalism at times obfuscated rather than elucidated understanding. He advocated a form of *mestizaje* which integrated the 'Indian' into modernity with reservations about the supposed archaic antecedents integral to the 'Indian' soul. The indigenous peoples of Mexico were assumed to be atavistic and backward and lacking any cultural traits worthy of enriching European society. Hence the only 'civilised' course of action was to incorporate the 'Indian' and phase out his allegedly inferior culture. As Gamio maintained in *Forjando Patria*, 'Indianising' the European must not be taken to 'ridiculous extremes':

Naturalmente que ese baño civilizador no pasó de la epidermis, quedando el cuerpo y el alma del indio como eran antes, prehispánicos. Para incorporar al indio no pretendamos "europeizarlo" de golpe; por el contrario, "indianicémonos" nosotros un tanto, para presentarle, ya diluida con la suya, nuestra civilización, que entonces no

encontrará exótica, cruel, amarga e incomprensible.

Naturalmente que no debe exagerarse a un extremo ridículo el acercamiento al indio. (Gamio 1982: 96)

As I have noted, Ministers of Education of the post-revolutionary period (Vasconcelos, Sáenz and Puig) agreed that education would be the best way to assimilate the 'Indian'.¹⁸

Operating as a modern secularised version of the sixteenth century missionary project, the school would teach students to speak Spanish, salute to the flag, celebrate national holidays, sing the national hymn, venerate national heroes, and learn the nation's history. (Dawson 2004: 21)

¹⁸ The differing presidential attitudes towards indigenous research can be seen when contrasting the attitude to anthropologists between Presidents Calles and Cárdenas. The latter supported the efforts of Moisés Sáenz, who served as director of the *Instituto Interamericano Indigenista* (III) (1936-41). Sáenz (who gained a PhD from Columbia University) belonged to the hegemonic government dominating Mexican politics in the 1920s and emerged as a leading state intellectual when he became Sub-Secretary of Public Education in 1925. His explicit plan was to build up an integrated programme of education that would foster social and economic change in all rural communities regardless of their label as 'Indian' or 'peasant'. These programmes focussed on health, literacy and the economic circumstances of rural communities rather than on their cultural particularities. He promoted economic growth and cultural pluralism in the countryside rather than the acculturation and assimilation of rural communities into a homogenised national culture. Sáenz also proposed the formation of a Department of Indian Affairs which would co-ordinate the development practices of all public agencies working in indigenous areas and address the needs of each particular group. Sáenz believed that Mexico could be integrated by constructing a multicultural state whose diverse communities would be linked by a fair and equitable economic system. This position contrasted with Gamio's view that the communities were parts of a larger historically constructed whole that incorporated both pre-Columbian and colonial societies (Patterson 1995).

Dawson's words acknowledge the contradictions between the continuity of colonialist formulations and the rupture of 'Indian' assimilation into the nation, which was implicit in *indigenista* education. Indigenous oral culture, mythology, medical knowledge, cosmology, religion and other complex social practices were not part of the curriculum, although artistic products and performances were showcased as part of 'national heritage'. *Indigenismo* therefore, as David Brading (1988) has argued, was a contradictory and at times paradoxical set of practices carried out by a wide spectrum of advocates. It should be noted that Gamio made significant strides forward in the field of anthropological relativism. Gamio's methodology built on the work of Boas and created experiments which concluded that cultural taste was culturally specific and that Western judgements of indigenous art were informed by standards of 'beauty' within the boundaries of a certain paradigm. In 1916, Gamio developed a relativist approach to the study of aesthetics. The eminent anthropologist carried out an experiment to test the validity of culturally specific judgements about pre-Hispanic art. He selected a number of Western subjects and recorded their responses to certain Aztec artefacts. He concluded that the responses of repulsion were expressed towards objects which did not conform to Western classical ideals. Objects were classified as 'artistic' which did conform most closely to classical ideals of 'beauty'. Gamio concluded that this transferral of values of the aesthetic produced a 'false' response as it understood nothing of the context or, as he called it, the 'physicobiological-social milieu' of the artefact's creation (Keen 1985: 515).

In post-revolutionary Mexico, the practices of painting, archaeology and anthropology interacted and co-existed as the main intellectual disciplines, and in turn this had a profound impact on artistic practices. Adolfo Best-Maugard (1891-1964) popularised folk-art during the same period. The close link between anthropology and art is again demonstrated by the fact that Best-Maugard had been commissioned by Franz Boas (1858-1942) to illustrate some of the eminent anthropologist's work in the Valley of Mexico. Anne Foster Staples (2004) notes how his discovery of basic forms common to pre-Columbian art were used as a method of teaching in Mexican schools from 1922 and that this was a European appropriation of 'Mexicanidad'. In 1923, Best Maugard published his famed Manual of Drawing (*Manuales y Tratados: Método de Dibujo: tradición, resurgimiento y evolución de arte Mexicano*) which was given free to 200,000 Mexican schoolchildren as a text book. Dr Atl (1865-1964) published his *Artes Populares de México* in 1922 which venerated Mexican 'folk arts'.

This interdisciplinary situation is the key to understanding the role played by the muralists in the post-revolutionary years. Goldman argues that one of the main roles of the Mexican Mural Movement was 'to convey information about the pre-Columbian heritage (in the 1920's, a new and revolutionary concept)' (1982: 111). Projects in the fields of anthropology and art were funded by the central government. The second generation archaeologist and anthropologist Pedro Armillas relates how in the crucial revolutionary year of 1910 during the independence celebrations 'every morning [...] at the foot of the Pyramid of the Sun' eminent scientists and politicians could be seen

carrying French champagne to eat breakfast together 'all expenses paid by the Porfirian government' (quoted in Zermeño 2002: 327). Artist Francisco Giotia was enlisted to help with one of the most important milestones of post-revolutionary Mexican thought, Gamio's celebrated study of Teotihuacán. Alma Reed observes the salient role played by the artist in the *Población de Valle de Teotihuacán* in the creation of public understanding of the indigenous peoples of Mexico:

Of tremendous impact both ideologically and technically upon Mexican art, and especially upon contemporary muralism, was the exhaustive study made by Dr. Manuel F. Gamio, the late director of UNESCO Indian Affairs Institute, in his *Poblacion de Valle de Teotihuacán*, published in 1922 by the Mexican government, with its hundreds of reproductions of ancient monuments and of various aspects of the region's colonial and modern life. Dr. Gamio arranged for Francisco Giotia to illustrate his monumental four volume work and, later to make similar sketches and paintings for a publication in Oaxaca. (1960: 16)

The attempt to promote the assimilation of the 'Indian' into a national self-image was a great leap forward in terms of how the indigenous population was viewed although again the reality of practical policy to implement change was pitifully inadequate. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Vasconcelos instigated the public image of cultural nationalism and activated the promotion of literacy amongst the rural masses by sending out teachers into the villages

and pueblos, building schools and libraries and disseminating volumes of European literary classics. Following the mindset of Gamio, far-reaching official patronage was given to cultivate national pride in indigenous arts and crafts:

Las más interesantes—si se les compara con las que representan la misma antigüedad cultural en Oriente y Occidente—son la arquitectura, el arte plumario, el arte lapidario, la metalurgia artística—oro y cobre—la cerámica, la decoración que es profusa y original, etc., etc. (Gamio 1916: 37)

The practice of anthropological research was often confined through complex and often contradictory relationships with the post-revolutionary Mexican governments. Miller (1999) notes how Gamio's significant research into the real living indigenous Mexican was curtailed by the post-revolutionary government. She asserts that '[t]he Mexican state's treatment of Gamio who had no desire to challenge its power, illuminates the context in which dissidence had to operate in the aftermath of the revolution' (1999: 139). A telling anecdote reveals some of the hypocrisy of the image put forward by the post-revolutionary government who employed the image of anthropology as championing the 'Indian' cause. When Gamio requested support for workshops for 'Indians' he was answered by Secretary of Education Vasconcelos: 'Look Manuel, I'll give you whatever you want for archaeology, but not for those Indians' (quoted in Miller 1999: 140).

These socio-cultural and political forces interacted with the muralists' intentions. The artists in turn acted as a conduit through which certain socio-political formulations were filtered. The public nature of the murals resulted in their being a political force in themselves but this was not always in agreement with the muralists' objectives. The domain of *indigenismo* is one of the most significant areas in which the divergent perspectives of the Mexican Mural Movement can be clearly observed.

The dynamic character of hegemonic practices is highlighted by the highly significant fact that:

[...] the use of revolutionary rhetoric to co-opt reformist sentiment was a double-edged sword, if it were convincing, people would be more likely to expect revolutionary improvements. [...] The rhetoric could also make the disparity between appearances and policies loom larger in the public eye, and threaten to make the government a victim of its own revolutionary myth. (O'Malley 1986: 117)

As this thesis focuses on the pictorial representations of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, in the context of the mythmaking involved in the construction of this nationalist rhetoric, Chapter Two discusses the work of *los tres grandes* which projected images of the 'Indian'. Therefore the diversity of the muralists' visions, 'looming large in the public eye', illustrates the ambivalent, variable nature of hegemonic practices in relation to post-revolutionary *indigenismo*.

Chapter Two:

Indigenismo and los tres grandes

The murals painted in post-revolutionary Mexico were at once celebrated, notorious and controversial. The artists involved are usually referred to as a unity and they were known collectively as the Mexican Mural Movement. Antonio Rodríguez points out that: *los tres grandes* or ‘the “Three Great Ones” of Mexico, as Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros were often called, were very different artistic personalities, although basically they had a great deal in common’ (1969: 360).

The rationale of the Mexican Mural Movement was and is perceived differently according to its diverse audiences. For instance, Baddeley and Fraser place the Mexican muralists in the international frame of dissident art, stating that along with the German Dadaists and Russian Constructivists they challenged the bourgeois conventions of art as a commodity (1989). Conversely, Jean Cassou celebrates the nationalism inherent in the murals, saying that: ‘Desde ahora toda la historia de esta bella nación, toda su leyenda fabulosa, dramática y revolucionaria está contada en esos muros’ (1960: 21). The murals were in fact widely perceived as a keystone in post-revolutionary nation-building. In many respects these public artworks complemented the hegemony of nationalist state programmes, whilst seeming to represent dissent. As Hennessy observes:

Even outrage and criticism became an anodyne as the propaganda value of the artefact to the public patron outweighed its ability to disturb the status quo. Muralism

seemed to succumb to the iron law of co-option of Mexican politics. (1999: 681)

The three most renowned muralists, exhibiting art in public spaces, Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco can be seen as such ‘architects of the nation’ as they were part of the post-revolutionary nation building process. Rivera actually depicts himself as an architect in a stairwell in the Ministry of Education (fig. 2.1) in the series which was painted in the early 1920s, at the height of Vasconcelos’s Mexican, nationalist, educational programme. Lomnitz uses a construction metaphor to explain the modern image of the patria projected by ‘nation builders’, and stresses the importance of public display in this process:

Starting with the most modern materials and designs at their disposal, they want to have diverse, functionally and hierarchically organised interior spaces, including spaces for exhibition to whoever comes in from outside. (2001: 144)

Although the public exposition of the murals was part of this larger nation-building context, this chapter will demonstrate that on closer scrutiny, the artists, political philosophies and works, often expressed divergent and incompatible views as to what constituted political art for the Mexican people. An essential part of this representation of the Mexican people included their diverse representations of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

Muralism, Nationalism and the 'Indian'

The representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico was central to the nationalist image of a unified Mexican people. Doremus argues that not only was *indigenismo* 'critical to the nationalist project', but that it also 'formed an integral part of the state's economic development plans' (2001: 376). The post-revolutionary government's 'discovery of the Indian—of the Indian's capacity for either troublesome sedition or supportive mobilization—was paralleled by their commitment to state and nation building (Knight 1990: 83). In an effort to control this unpredictability, the post-revolutionary state ostensibly represented the interests of a unique, unified Mexican people. Gutiérrez observes that:

Official Mexican nationalist mythologies are interwoven with the recorded antiquity of the indigenous past, and this indigenous past and present inject uniqueness into the culture of Mexico. (1999: 22)

The murals were a powerful transmitter of certain nationalist mythologies. As much of Mexico's population of the post-revolutionary period was illiterate, public art works acted as social newspapers, seeming to convey facts to the Mexican people. It is important to note that in this period film and radio were in their infancy and that the still visual image therefore remained an effective force (Hennessy 1991: 685). This visual communication was fundamental as 'anthropologists' and writers' efforts were [...] stymied by their inability to reach the masses, the majority of whom were illiterate' (Doremus 2001b: 378).

The 'revolutionary' visions of the 'Indian', projected by the muralists onto government buildings, therefore, had considerable impact on post-revolutionary Mexican society:

They saw the Indian, no longer as a member of a crowd scene in an operetta, or a background for historical pageants, but as a living figure in a tragedy. It was an astounding re-awakening, as if the sculptures and pyramids, the polychrome vases and the temples, with which the ancient inhabitants of the Anahuac had literally covered the whole of their extensive territory, had suddenly come to life and were crowding in on them. (Rodríguez 1969: 159)

This socio-cultural animation of the indigenous past into the post-revolutionary present was a key feature of indigenous theory of the time. The muralists were and are often perceived as being key transmitters of the *indigenista* element in nationalist discourse. Clemency Coggins outlines a familiar observation of the collective vision of the Mexican mural movement and their representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico:

Indigenismo flowered in the 1930s and 1940s with the maturing of anthropology and ethnology as disciplines, and the movement was dynamically empowered by the allegiance of Mexican muralist painters such as Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros [...] who combined admiration of Indians and their ancient culture with

loathing of the Spanish conquistadors and of United States Imperialism to create a rich and evocative pictorial socialist romanticism. (2002: 103)

Knight's eloquently-expressed view reinforces this common 'understanding' concerning the painters' representation of the 'Indian'. He argues that the Mexican muralists embodied one of the major means of transmitting the rhetoric of *indigenismo*:

[...] the most celebrated representatives of this new official philosophy were of course the revolutionary muralists, who provided pictorial affirmation of Indian valour, nobility, suffering and achievement, which they set against a revived black legend of Spanish oppression. (Knight 1990: 82)

Knight also observes that post-revolutionary *indigenismo* was another external imposition of labels and categories upon the 'Indian', who had been defined by others since the conquest. He argues that, although this way of dealing with the 'Indian problem' was more progressive and sympathetic than its *Porfirian* antecedents, once more '[t]he Indians were the objects not the authors of *indigenismo*' (Knight 1990: 77). It is true to say that the muralists played a vital role in the building of Mexican cultural nationalism and therefore inevitably interacted with the authorship of *indigenista* discourse. However, the differing perspectives of the muralists produced diverse results from this interaction. This chapter focuses on artworks which exemplify the multiplicity of these three painters and their representations of the

'Indian' in the process of the construction of the post-revolutionary nation. I will begin with an analysis of Rivera's work then move onto Orozco and finally Siqueiros.

Rivera: un indigenista orgulloso

In the periodical, *México en la Cultura* 9 December, 1938, Lázaro Cárdenas, proudly celebrated Rivera's works. The President attributed *indigenista* credentials to the artist in order to highlight his revolutionary status and proclaim him a national treasure:

Rivera es un indigenista orgulloso de nuestra cepa autóctona; su personalidad artística está impregnada de gran sensibilidad innovadora que se prodiga en expresiones de progreso y fraternidad humanas [...] En sus murales es como un campesino que reclama su tierra; como un líder en las gestos del 1º de mayo; pero es también un maestro que imparte cátedras en los corredores de los edificios públicos.
(Cárdenas 1938)¹⁹

Contrary to the above points of view which state that all three of the key muralists put forward *indigenismo*, in this thesis, I argue that Rivera is the only one of *los tres grandes* who can be considered to be an *indigenista*. Although, the artist's long European training undoubtedly influenced the style and content of his work, in the cultural supplement of *El Nacional* (1949), he referred to his apprenticeship as 'a regrettable waste of time' (quoted in Rodríguez

¹⁹ No page numbers in original.

1969: 161). The artist projected an image of being quintessentially Mexican describing his return to Mexico as a 'homecoming' and a rebirth, saying '[i]t was as if I were being born anew, born into a new world' (Rivera 1991: 72). This description of fresh beginnings has strong resonances with the sense that the post-revolutionary state was new and unsullied, as well as representing a distinct break from the 'bad old days' of the Porfiriato.

Rivera's apprenticeship is inevitably a distinct factor in the racial politics of his representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the potential for this to be a largely Eurocentric vision. However, it was this European experience that allowed him to study varied aspects of Western art, participate in some of the most important artistic movements of early modernism and make strong and significant allegiances with many important artistic and political figures. As Rodríguez points out, for the duration of 'his stay in Europe, Rivera progressed, eyes open and a sketch book in hand, through all the 'isms' which were part of the agitating world of art' (1969: 162). Paradoxically, although Rivera dismissed his European apprenticeship the training and knowledge gained at this time:

[...] enabled him to initiate and become the leader of the mural movement, and explain many of the aspects and tendencies of mural painting in present-day Mexico, which was to a great extent inspired by him. (Rodríguez 1969: 161)

The European influence on Rivera's work is present to varying degrees throughout his mural career and strongly shapes his

representation of the indigenous. I have selected three milestones from Rivera's work: *Creation* (1922) in the National Preparatory School, *Political Vision of the Mexican People* (1923–1928) in the Ministry of Education and *Detroit Industry* (1932–1933) at the museum of the Ford Motor Company, Detroit. These murals illustrate the artist's portrayal of the indigenous peoples of the Mexican nation, and his treatment of concurrent racial themes. They have been chosen from Rivera's prolific output of public art, as they clearly illustrate that his work was, in part, acting as a conduit for *indigenista* discourse, in the context of post-revolutionary nation building. The first fresco is heavily influenced by European style, the second is more distinctively 'Mexican' and the third shows the migration of *indigenista* themes to Rivera's work in North America.

Milestone One:

The Creation of the *Mestizo* in the Image of the European

The first landmark I have selected is *Creation* (1922) (fig. 2.2); which was Rivera's earliest mural and was commissioned by Vasconcelos soon after the artist's return to Mexico. This work was painted in the Bolívar Amphitheatre of the National Preparatory School which was the upper school of the former San Ildefonso College in Mexico City. Catlin argues that the challenge 'was to devise a composition that would symbolise the potential fusion of native indigenous tradition with the moral imperatives of Judeo-Christian religion and the intellectual standards of Hellenic civilisation' (1986: 237). The four evangelists are represented by the angel, the ox, the lion and the eagle. In addition, the classical style of the mural and

allusions to the personified virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, clearly indicate that Rivera is drawing on a European visual repertoire. However, Rochfort observes that, despite Italian stylistic features, 'he adopted a very different approach' after his visit to Tehuantepec as 'the imagery is tropical, with an abundance of lush foliage' (1987: 22). Rochfort also notes that Rivera has made explicit references to Mexican racial 'types' as the figures in *Creation* are not European but Mexican and 'the facial features of the figures are emphatically Indian (Rochfort 1987: 22). He goes on to describe the hybrid character of the mural: 'Although the composition displays Rivera's debt to Italian fresco painting, the features of many of the figures, particularly the women are clearly those of the Mexican mestizo' (Rochfort 1987:22).

Rivera himself states that *Creation* was intended to combine eternal, universal qualities and simultaneously represent the racial diversity of Mexico:

The subject of the mural was Creation, which I symbolised as everlasting and as the core of human history. More specifically, I presented a racial history of Mexico through figures representing all the types that entered the Mexican blood stream, from the autochthonous Indian to the present-day, half-breed Spanish Indian. (Rivera 1991: 76)

However, as racial classification is fundamentally socio-political and questionable, Rivera's categories of 'Indian' and *mestizo* can be related to the reductionist vocabulary characteristic of *indigenismo* which attempted to combine the 'universal' and the Mexican. The

supposedly ‘universal’, ‘everlasting’ qualities in the mural are clearly European in origin. Knight describes ‘the subjective nature of Indian/mestizo status’, and he also notes that, as ‘it depends on a range of perceived characteristics, rather than on any immutable and innate attributes, status is obviously subjective’ (1990: 74). He goes on to stress that:

A key distinction must be made between the intrinsic perception of the individual or community on the one hand, and the extrinsic perception of outside observers—politicians, census-takers, gringo anthropologists—on the other, for the two may not tally. (Knight 1990: 74)

Brading (1998) points out how Gamio had selected certain ‘racial’ characteristics which delineated what it was to be ‘Indian’ in the national collective consciousness and brought ‘culture’ forward as the chief distinction between ‘Indian’ and ‘non-Indian’. There are clear links between anthropological theory and state policy in Mexico. The state used anthropological theory which aimed for redemption and integration to reinvigorate the idea of racial mixing or *mestizaje*. They hoped that by racially homogenizing the nation, *mestizaje* would pacify racial conflict and create a unified Mexican people.

In line with this post-revolutionary aim, *Creation* demonstrates a validation of indigenous and *mestizo* features by representing them in the form of ‘beautiful’ women. This was distinctly a break from the flagrantly racist past which denigrated the ‘Indian’ as ugly and animal-like. Although the figures in *Creation* are presented in classical poses,

this elevation and 'beautifying' of the non-European, clearly disturbed the racist hierarchical classifications of certain bourgeois critics. On March the 1925, one critic in *El Universal Ilustrado* stated:

I looked in vain for something pleasing in those aboriginal nudes, that is, if not something pleasant as art at least something pleasurable to look at. I could no longer control my indignation. (quoted in Charlot 1963: 265)

One might conclude that *indigenismo* contained counter-hegemonic aspects, which questioned Eurocentric, racial assumptions. *Indigenista* thought was, however, both complex and replete with contradictions (Brading 1988; Knight 1990). Knight notes how '[o]fficial ideology, [...] has thus perpetuated a kind of instrumental Indianness but this Indianness stands at odds with social reality' (1990:100). Doremus observes that the 'artists and intellectuals undermined their own efforts by unconsciously fostering negative stereotypes of the Indian' (2001b: 378). In the work of Rivera, these stereotypes are often unwittingly illustrated in his attempt to redeem the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

Milestone Two:

Revolutionary Education and Redemption of the 'Indian'

In art the tension between [...] contrasting impulses led to the creation of paintings which at their best were both national in content and modern in form and technique, a

combination in part justified by the experience of the Revolution and by the revolutionary ambition to create modes of expression which were both public and didactic. (Brading 1998: 87)

The second milestone is Rivera's mural series at the Ministry of Education entitled *Political Vision of the Mexican People* (1923-1928). The situation and title of the work, suggest that the mural is both didactic and nationalist. Brading's words above emphasise the educational nature of public art in the post-revolutionary period. Bradley Smith holds the 'official' view on the period between 1920-1940 which he calls 'the new era' noting that '[b]ecause of his intense interest in education, Alvaro Obregón [had] made it possible for a start to be made in the diffusion of a *genuine*²⁰ Mexican culture' (1975: 276). At the heart of this idea of an *authentic* Mexican culture was the idea of educating the 'Indian'. Knight announces the importance of the pedagogical model when he states that '[e]ducation was the chief weapon in the *indigenista* armory' (1990: 82).

The Minister of Education saw the potential for public art to promote his educational program and when:

[...] the artist completed 'Creation' in April 1923, [he] appointed him as the 'Head of the Department of Plastic Crafts' in the new Ministry of Education. A 'somewhat nebulous title [which] was in effect a commission for Rivera to take charge of the decoration of Vasconcelos' new building. (Rochfort 1987: 22)

²⁰ Emphasis mine.

The murals that Rivera painted at the Ministry of Education ‘mark the most significant stage in the Mexican mural movement’s development as a radical national public art’ (Rochfort 1987: 22). Therefore, the image of the indigenous that they contained inevitably conveyed powerful messages, which proliferated outside the walls of the building.

The whole mural series at the Ministry of Education portrays a narrative conveyed through the ‘concept underlying post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism – the idea that the nation’s culture was both the product and possession of the people’ (Rochfort 1993: 51). Central to this idea was the nation’s supposedly beneficent role in redeeming the Mexican ‘Indian’. Rivera created an ‘instructive’ series in which the indigenous peoples of Mexico move out of their state of collective ‘primitive’ ritual into the transformative state of ‘civilisation’, through the vehicle of revolutionary consciousness.

The Courtyard of Labour and the Courtyard of the Fiestas

The Ministry of Education is a three-storey building divided into two parts on all floors: the Courtyard of Labour and the Courtyard of the Fiestas. I have selected two exemplary panels from each of these courtyards which follow the narrative sequence of *The Political Vision of the Mexican People* in order to make specific points.

The first of these panels is *Entrance to the Mine* (fig. 2.4) and is situated on the ground floor of the Courtyard of Labour. The figures’ backs are bent with the weight of their picks as they trudge into the gaping darkness at the mouth of the mine. The sombre palette portrays a solemn and shadowy scene. The miners’ clothes are soiled

with soot and the scene is overshadowed with a grim and melancholic mood. This panel, depicting the mineworkers' plight, highlights certain crucial political differences between patron and artist and their attitude to indigenous workers. Below this panel Rivera had inscribed a revolutionary poem by Carlos Gutiérrez Cruz:

Compañero minero,
doblado por el peso de la tierra
tu mano yerra
cuando saca metal para el dinero.

Haz puñales
con todos los metales
y así,
verás que los metales
después son para tí.

(Gutiérrez Cruz quoted in Charlot 1963:263)

Folgarait notes how Vasconcelos had argued with Rivera about the content of the poem and, although the artist removed it, he wrote the poem out on paper placed it into a glass jar and embedded 'the jar into the plaster on the same spot, now under the freshly repainted surface' (1998: 78). This act of covert defiance by Rivera and the Governmental stance on the incendiary verse illustrate, to some degree, the complexity and sometimes antagonistic nature of Rivera's political relationship with his patrons.

Secondly, the *Liberation of the Peon*, (fig 2.5), also on the ground floor of the Courtyard of Labour, is considered in the context of the

whole series. This sequence portrays social revolution on third floor above (fig. 2.7), and will be discussed in more detail later in this section. The image of the peasant/‘Indian’ beaten to death by hired gunmen suggests that, prior to the emancipation of social revolution, the only deliverance of the peasant from life’s hardships was through death. The positioning of the peasant/ ‘Indian’ as a victim of the forces of social injustice in an image which is reminiscent of the *pietà*, as exemplified in Giotto’s panel *Lamentation* (fig. 3.33), from his series in the Scrovegni (or Arena) Chapel in Padua. This portrayal links the indigenous *campesino* to both Christ and the pantheon of martyrs of the Revolution, and consequently elevates him from the status of an ordinary citizen.

Thirdly, an idealisation of the peasant/‘Indian’ can also be found on the ground floor of the Court of the Fiestas within a sequence of several panels portraying indigenous festivals. As Rochfort says, this series mainly consists of ‘the celebration of the life and traditions of the Indian peasant’ (1993: 59). I will focus on one panel *Offering* (fig.2.6) in the Day of the Dead series on the ground floor of the Court of the Fiestas. In this panel the indigenous peasants are portrayed as a humble flock as their heads are bowed and some hold hats in a deferential gesture of respect. They are solemnly absorbed in the ritual offering to the dead. The repeating orange archways, enhance the sense of parochial enclosure. The yellow candle-glow has deep religious significance and it illuminates the faces of the encircling devotees, uniting them in ‘simple’, communal harmony. Ades cites this panel as an example of the artist’s enchantment with indigenous life. Nonetheless, she argues, ‘Rivera’s love of the “curious, attractive and

original” in the life of the Indians [...], to use Gamio’s phrase, was not modulated by any concern for the official policies of assimilation’ (1989: 201).

Rivera’s depiction of indigenous festivals is in keeping with *indigenista* thought. In 1932 in *California Arts and Architecture Magazine*, Rivera described the ascension from the first to second floors of the Ministry of Education as a real and symbolic rise from the lower stages of ‘primitivism’ to the civilised redemption of the peasant through social revolution:

Allegorical figures personified the ascending stages of the social evolution of the country through the primitive society through the peoples’ revolution to the liberated and fulfilled social order of the future. (quoted in Rochfort 1993: 59)

This Social Darwinist language used by Rivera to describe the ‘evolutionary’ move out from the ‘primitive’ rituals of peasant life suggests that his ‘celebration’ of these rites is uncertain. These activities are commemorated as archaic, quaint folklore yet marginalised compared to the serious business of revolution. Similarly, ‘Gamio assembled a team of experts to investigate every aspect of ‘Indian Civilisation’, so as to encounter the measures which would enable the Mexican state to incorporate the native peoples into the national community’ (Brading 1988: 87). Gamio defined this national community ‘as but one variant of the universal culture of liberal capitalism’, a modernity which ‘required the destruction of existing folk-loric beliefs and practices’ (Brading 1988: 87). Rivera identified

the new nation as 'revolutionary Mexico', yet, in a similar gesture to this famed anthropologist, saw the redemption of the 'Indian' as a climb out of the depths of 'primitive' folk-lore and ritual. It is significant that Gamio followed Andrés Molina Enriquez, whose *Grandes problemas nacionales* (1909) diagnosed Mexico's ills through the theoretical frame of European thinkers Comte, Spencer, Darwin, and Haeckel and analyzed Mexican society in terms of ethnic groups with a close correlation to social classes (Knight 1990: 85). Rivera literally portrayed the ascension to civilisation in this way in the Ministry of Education as the viewer moves up the floors, a scene of political transformation occurs gradually as the 'Indian' moves step by step towards 'emancipation' through revolution.

Finally, the opening image on the third floor series of the Courtyard of Fiestas entitled *Distributing Arms* (fig. 2.7) shows the allotment of arms and a revolutionary solution to the backwardness and poverty of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Children and women revolutionaries, represented by Frida Kahlo, the Mexican artist who was later to marry Rivera, and Tina Modotti the famed photographer. Cuban political activist Antonio Mella and Siqueiros are also portrayed in radical action. In the background, a revolutionary in blue overalls points the way ahead. The famous Mexican characters are depicted with clearly recognisable faces. Whereas, once again, it is only the revolutionary leaders amongst the 'ordinary' Mexican people who are depicted with full features, the 'masses' being depicted as a faceless crowd. This is clearly a vanguard vision as people are either indistinguishable, or have their backs to the viewer. The image suggests that the peasant/'Indian', who is subsumed in this crowd, will be led out of

their backward ways by the revolutionary leadership of the intellectual elite. The fact that this image of successful revolution is in the Ministry of Education, is significant as it educates the people with the notion that the change depicted as a result of the Marxist Revolution, is comparable to that of the Mexican Revolution. An artificial transformative-image of the lives of indigenous peoples is projected which creates a false resolution to their real difficulties.

Milestone Three: Coatlicue and Detroit Industry

Coggins holds that possibly ‘the most important single event in the reconstruction of Mexican cultural patrimony was the discovery, in 1790, of two huge sculptures of extraordinary religious significance for the Aztec’ (2002: 101). These were the Great Calendar Stone (fig. 2.8) and the statue of the Goddess Coatlicue (fig. 2.9). Rivera depicted this Goddess, otherwise known as ‘Serpent-Skirt’, on the Detroit Industry South Wall fresco (fig. 2.10), in which he combines her figure, in the lower right corner, with the stamping press machine.²¹ She is an intrinsic part of the technology and blends seamlessly into the mechanical perfection of the design. Multiracial workers operate the machinery and the presence of *Coatlicue* suggests a link with ancient Mexican origins which harmonise with the working order of modern industry and modern, American man.

Rivera’s choice of the Coatlicue was highly significant, as the Goddess had a long history of representing the ‘indigenous element’ in Mexican culture. Baddeley (2004) argues that the statue of Coatlicue

²¹ This work was commissioned in 1932 by Edsel Ford who was president of the Arts Commission as well as of the Ford Motor Company and Dr. W. R. Valentiner who was Director of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

is a specific, powerful image which with its related clusters of meaning has served as an expression of national identity at specific historical moments. She describes how the Coatlicue has come to represent the prehispanic aesthetic overall. She notes how the celebrated statue of Coatlicue is an effigy of the Aztec-Mexica mother goddess, the mother of the sun god Huitzilopochtli, which formerly stood in the great temple of Tenochtitlan. She also describes this figure of the Aztec goddess as ‘an almost pictographic amalgam of religious and political symbolism which, since its discovery, has served as a cultural litmus paper of changing attitudes towards the pre-Hispanic past’ (2000: 53). Brading notes how pre-Columbian artefacts were employed by post-revolutionary *indigenismo* as signifiers for the validation of indigenous cultures:

In essence, the only item of value that Gamio encountered in his exploration of Indian civilisation was its aesthetic artefacts, objects which could serve as a legitimate source of national pride and hence worthy of display in museums erected to celebrate Mexican cultural achievements.
(Brading 1998: 87)

This image of Coatlicue for the Ford Motor Company is an example of Rivera’s linking of the Mesoamerican past to modernisation. Rubén Gallo describes the artist’s link between modern industry and prehispanic origins in this mural as retrograde: ‘The stamping press featured in Detroit Industry clearly illustrates Rivera’s process of working backward’ and that ‘Rivera saw the stamping press less as a

symbol of the technological future than as proof that the Aztec past lived on in the present' (2005: 16). He remarks that 'Rivera's Detroit mural is a project riddled with contradictions: it celebrates the future while turning to the past, it promotes the new technologies of seeing while employing a traditional artistic medium' (Gallo 2005: 16). This contradiction was in fact integral to *indigenista* thought. Rivera's hybrid creation in Detroit Industry borrows Coatlicue's physical form but transfers nothing of the original meaning attributed to the Goddess. She is represented as if her original transformative force is parallel to the 'transformative' force of modern industry represented by the Ford plant. Her presence at once glorifies modern industrialisation, the American plant and Fordism.

The presence of the Aztec Goddess links industrial modernity to the pre-Columbian past. Therefore, by metonymic association, Rivera's Coatlicue-stamping press machine ostensibly represents the interests of the indigenous peoples of Mexico by seeming to validate their presence, but in reality does not deal with their specific contemporary needs. This glorification of industrialisation was a key component of the rhetoric of post-revolutionary modernisation. It is another example of the continuity in supposedly new formulations, the roots of which go back to pre-revolutionary precedents.

The discourses of industrialisation and the reinvention of the Mexican past have a long and intertwined history in Mexico. The more the future sped ahead under a discourse of teleological progress, the more vehemently the ancient past was used to express a coherent and distinctive Mexican culture. This industrialising culture was a powerful part of the 'northern bourgeois sensibility' of both Carranza

and Obregón who ‘believed that the solutions to Mexico’s poverty and instability could be found in the same modernising ethos that had enriched the nation’s producers in the previous three decades’ (Dawson 2004: xvi). This philosophy also dominated *indigenista* thought. Knight notes that although post-revolutionary *indigenistas* ‘followed Porfirian precedents, [...] they did not like to admit as much’ (1990: 83). ‘Keenly concerned with remedying Mexico’s backwardness, early *indigenistas* believed that modernity and nationhood were virtually synonymous’ (Dawson 2004: xvii). A way of ostensibly remedying this ‘backwardness’ was by symbolically transporting the past into the present and using the combined signifiers as an amalgamated symbol for hope of an inclusive society.

Morelos-Moreno (1994) illustrates how the use of collected ‘exoticised’ pre-Columbian artefacts and artistic products had existed since the time of the conquest and these idolatrous artefacts held a certain fascination for the European by their potentially dangerous mystery and otherness. He describes how throughout ‘the 17th and 18th centuries, the Spanish and colonial governments made a complex and contradictory attempt to explain the Indian past through its material remains’ (Morelos-Moreno 1994: 172). The transfer of power from the *Peninsulares* to the *Criollos* and the indigenous liberal President Benito Juárez in the late 1860s did not assuage class conflict and latent tension. During the Porfiriato (1876-1911), the gap between rich and poor widened further as the country began to industrialise. In these years museum culture corresponded even more closely to the official version of history disseminated by the central hegemonic core.

The parallels between Rivera's work and museum culture are particularly apparent in *Detroit Industry* as it is actually housed in the Detroit Museum of Fine Arts. Gallo notes the hyper-reality of this display space, stating that the Detroit mural 'presents a grossly inaccurate view' as it 'celebrates an industry that was mired in labour tensions' (2005: 15-16). He recalls that in 1932, the time Rivera painted this mural, 'Detroit was a city devastated by the Great Depression, troubled by organized crime, and often immobilized by street protests against the unfair labor practices of the Ford Motor Company' (2005: 15). Nevertheless, he adds, 'Detroit Industry portrays a harmonious world where men of all races work side by side to build a better and more modern society' (Gallo 2005: 15). The mural depicts different racial groups at work in the plant and clearly illustrates that this one dimension defines their identity.

Samuel Ramos observed that the theme of the prehispanic past is actually most forcefully expressed in the National Palace:

La visión que tiene Rivera de la vida indígena la ha desplegado en dimensiones monumentales en varios murales realizados en la ciudad de México, pero muy especialmente en la obra que actualmente pinta en el Palacio Nacional. [...] Una vez que ha estudiado y representado la vida de los indígenas en la época presente, se ha remontado al pretérito para revivir su historia en los monumentos de mayor esplendor. De este modo Rivera ha puesto su arte al servicio de una reivindicación de los

indígenas y su cultura, en el presente y en el pasado. (1986
[1958]: 36)

This idea that the indigenous peoples of Mexico were revindicated by Rivera's murals in the National Palace will be one of the main questions highlighted in Chapters Three, Four and Five. The three themes of the *mestizo*, the redemption of the 'Indian' and the conflation of the prehispanic past with the modernist future, will be explored in greater depth in the analysis of the National Palace Mural.

Unified Rhetoric and Fragmented Politics

In the, *Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores de México* a Marxist identification with the worker combined with *indigenista* sentiments, included strong references to the prehispanic past. The opening lines are addressed firstly '[a] la raza indígena humillada durante siglos', and then 'a los soldados convertidos en verdugos por los pretorianos; a los obreros y campesinos azotados por la avaricia de los ricos'. Later on, the Manifesto addresses indigenous peoples directly in terms implying struggle, 'tú, soldado indio' (1989 [1923]: 323). The Manifesto combines diverse elements that explicitly display certain social forces at large both locally and globally at the particular historical juncture. The declaration is a culturally specific hybrid born of Western Marxism, European Modernism, Mexican *indigenismo* and a derivation of the claim to Sovereignty that has characterised Mexico since independence.

Later, however, '[t]he tension between native roots and universal, not to say, futuristic ambition eventually led Siqueiros and Orozco to attack the work of Rivera' as they overtly criticised what they regarded as Rivera's quaint exoticising of indigenous peoples' (Brading 1988: 86). The artists criticised 'his overly narrow nationalism as an unoriginal blend of archaeological revivalism, folkloric narrative and Gauguinesque primitivism' (Brading 1988: 86). Rodríguez uses nationalist discourse about the 'authentic' Mexico in order to outline some of the fundamental differences between the muralists, stating that:

Orozco's work is, perhaps, closer to the true core of Mexico than Rivera's. Siqueiros's paintings reflect more vividly the anxieties and unrest of the rebellion. But neither possesses the national, social and aesthetic transcendence of Rivera's. (1969: 310)

The following section outlines Orozco's oblique relationship to *indigenista* discourse and highlights some of the contradictions which existed in his idiosyncratic political outlook which reflect some of the complexities of post-revolutionary racial politics.

Orozco: Contradictory Satirist

Alma Reed the influential journalist and art patron of the post-revolutionary period described Orozco as 'Mexico's most powerful and significant muralist' (1960: 421). In an article published in 1926,

Orozco criticised the idealism of Rivera's representation of the 'Indian' in the face of pressing social problems:

What he does by putting a profusion of Indians in his pictures is to make hay while the Indian smallpox rages, a disease that is making our politicians itch [...] As art for export it is understandable, but there is no excuse for painting it in Mexico. (quoted in Charlot 1963: 12)

Paz observes that although Orozco dealt with similar themes to Siqueiros and Rivera, 'la historia de México, la Revolución, los grandes conflictos sociales del siglo XX [...] su actitud casi siempre es distinta a la de Rivera y Siqueiros' and often 'es la opuesta. Su verdadero tema no es la historia de México sino lo que está atrás o debajo, lo que oculta el acontecer histórico' (Paz 1994 [1986]: 235-236). Similarly outlining the artist's distinctiveness, Rodríguez states that '[o]f all Mexican painters, José Clemente Orozco is the furthest removed from Diego Rivera and the muralist movement of 1921-2' (1969: 311). He cites the reason for this distance as 'the originality of his work and [...] his attitude to life' (1969: 311). He goes on to say that whereas 'Rivera devotes his life to glorifying his people Orozco criticises them [and that, while] Rivera raises idols, Orozco destroys them. Rivera's leitmotiv is construction; Orozco's is fire, destruction and chaos (1969: 311). Sergei Eisenstein, the radical Russian film-maker, who was a great admirer of Orozco, observes both the artist's fierce independence and the emotive power of his work, describing him as 'a painter outside an audience' (Eisenstein 1980[1932]: 68). David Elliot further highlights the artist's

uniqueness and political autonomy saying that: 'Orozco was unusual amongst Mexican artists of his generation in that he rarely published anything other than on art and he never joined a political party (Elliot 1980: 2).

Another difference between Orozco and Siqueiros particularly was that he was not averse to using traditional materials and styles. In an essay entitled 'Paint the Revolution' published in 1926 in *The New Masses*, John dos Passos advised that 'you can go to the superb baroque building of the *Preparatoria* where Clemente Orozco is working [...] [h]is panels express each one an idea with a fierce concentration and economy of planes and forms I've never seen before except in the work of the old Italian, Cimabue' (dos Passos 1988 [1926]: 95). Although Rivera ostensibly links this use of materials to authentic prehispanic techniques, Orozco shuns the picturesque romanticisation of the 'Indian' along with the idea of revolutionary glory:

I personally loathe to reproduce in my works the hateful and degenerate types of the lower classes, generally deemed a picturesque subject, fit to flatter the tourist and so relieve him of his cash [...]. Such thoughts lead me to eschew once and for all the painting of Indian sandals and dirty clothes. From the bottom of my heart I do wish those who wear them would discard such outfits and get civilised [...] in my 1916 show and in all of my serious works there is not one Indian sandal and not one straw hat. (Orozco quoted in Charlot 1963: 227)

An example of his work which is stripped of the picturesque depictions which characterise Rivera's portrayals is *The Trinity* (1926) (fig. 2.15), which is regarded as representing 'el campesino, el soldado y el obrero' (Fernández 1956: 38). In reality, it is difficult to distinguish between the occupational identities of the figures or ascertain any racial affiliation in the image. Rivera also uses this triad of peasant, soldier and worker in the National Palace mural, but with a distinctive *mestizo* characterisation, a combination which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. Orozco's depiction shows the tragedy and futility of armed struggle on a basic, human level, rather than with racially-defined perspective. This is diametrically opposed to Rivera's utopian perspective on the Mexican *mestizo*. The figure on the right is grief stricken as is forcefully indicated by the position of the limbs covering his face: 'cuyas manos y brazos expresan todo el dolor, la angustia, la fe de nuestros rancheros, como también expresan la potencia artística de Orozco' (Fernández 1956: 38). The positioning of the arms of the figures and the enfolding proximity of their bodies creates a structural and conceptual unity. The mixture of light and subtly differing skin colours makes the races of the characters indistinguishable. *The Trinity* bears testimony to Orozco's belief that race could be eliminated by focusing on corporeal humanity as a fundamental leveller. Charlot describes the figure in Orozco's work as '[t]he human body is to be his only subject matter, stripped of all racial tags' (1963: 228). Reed comments that in his compositions the main 'goal was a symphonic ensemble, not a series of fragmentary and disconnected anecdotes' (1960: 53). The emotive power of this work and the harmonious, interchangeable depiction of the characters

demonstrate the artist's assertion that 'humanity' rather than race is his 'one theme': 'My one tendency is emotion to a maximum. My means, the real and integral representation of bodies in themselves and in their inter-relation' (Orozco quoted in Charlot 1963: 530).

Orozco's attitude towards the 'Indian' was, in fact, replete with inconsistencies. Rodríguez (1969) clearly states that 'Orozco was never an *indigenista*' (345), whilst simultaneously stressing 'his contradictory attitude to important events of his time' (355). Although the above quotation is the antithesis of the idealisation of the 'Indian' in *indigenista* discourse, with this sentiment Orozco is actually in line with the 'civilising' dimension of *indigenismo*, which drew heavily on anthropological discourse and aspired to a Eurocentric vision of a redeeming modernity. This hierarchy of culture, from the 'primitive' to the 'civilised', denigrated the cultural practices of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, contemporary with Orozco. This incongruous attitude was often a reflection of the complex contradictions inherent in the socio-political narratives of post-revolutionary Mexico. In his autobiography Orozco in fact overtly criticised the racial determinism of *indigenismo*: 'We are continuously classifying ourselves into Indians, creoles and *mestizos*, laying stress on the blood mixture as if dealing with race horses' (quoted in Rodríguez 1969: 194). This incisive deconstruction of racial hierarchies is consistent with Knight's (1990) observation, that in twentieth-century classification systems, what is really 'ethnicity' is often substituted by the term 'race'.

The Friar and the Indian (1929-1932) (fig. 2.12) has been described by one critic as Orozco's depiction of the benevolence of the Catholic Church (Herrera 1996). Herrera asserts that Orozco thought the

religion of the Catholic priests to be an improvement on the brutality of pre-Columbian religions and that the artist's 'Franciscan missionaries at the National Preparatory School lift the Indians out of abject misery' (1996: 10). Rodríguez observes that '[a]ccording to Orozco's interpretation of the history of ancient Mexico, the Spaniards freed the Indians from [...] ignominious conditions. Franciscans raised the people from the orphaned state to which they had been reduced by the theocratic Aztec society' (1969: 194). Nonetheless, *The Friar and the Indian* is open to polysemic interpretations. The smooth continuity of line joining the two figures and the juxtaposition of the dominant clothed monk with the fragile nakedness of the Indian can be viewed as a power relationship in which the autonomy of the weak 'Indian' is subsumed by the smothering 'protection' of the strong Coloniser.

Joyce Waddell Bailey points out that 'Orozco uses the expressionistic elements of distortion, abstraction, exaggeration and symbolism to communicate his subjective view of the situation rather than trying to describe an objective reality' (1980: 75). This observation accentuates the influence of European models on the artist's work. She also notes that any attempt to ascribe his style and imagery to solely 'European sources is seriously questioned by a review of his early graphics' (1980: 90). Orozco produced many political cartoons and caricatures during the post-revolutionary decades which show the strong influence of the local Mexican engraver and satirist José Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913). In his autobiography, Orozco acknowledged the influence of this great master of satire: 'el primer estímulo que despertó mi imaginación y me impulsó a emborronar papel con los primeros muñecos, la primera

revelación de la existencia del arte de la pintura' (quoted in Suárez 1972: 231). Reed notes how as a child on his way to school, Orozco 'would stand in deep fascination staring at the trenchant characters of the 'great satirical artist' (1960: 42). Similarly, Rivera admired the courageous master of satire Posada as his own strongest Mexican influence. Rivera eulogised Posada and likened him to the heroes of political resistance, calling him 'Precursor de Flores Magón, Zapata y Santanón, guerrillero de hojas volantes y heroicos periódicos de oposición' (Rivera 1996 [1930]: 134). Posada's fame is known to be due to the interest the Mexican muralists took in his work:

His rise to fame, the growth of the Posada legend, is due to the generation of artists who changed the course of Mexican art in the years after the Revolution [...] Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros took up Posada's cause, often in hyperbolic terms, and acknowledge their debt, direct or indirect, to the humble popular print-maker. The legend was born. (Wollen 1989: 14)

Charlot also describes Orozco as following the tradition of Posada and being 'widely known as a lethal political cartoonist' (1963: 225). Baddeley and Fraser also comment on the artist's talent for lampooning, 'civilised' society and they compare him to the German social-satirist George Grosz, as both artists used 'the language of caricature and the satirical broadsheet [in...] an often biting yet expressive allegorical style with which to comment on contemporary life' (1989: 82). Orozco's political satire often employed a Posada-like

calavera (fig. 2.13), the skeletal figure which is central to Mexican Day of the Dead celebrations. An example of the use of this motif can be seen in the Dartmouth College fresco series.

This popular art form carries great significance in the country's *mestizo* culture. Orozco, believed strongly in the need to emphasize the hybrid nature of his culture 'by not simply rejecting the Hispanic in favour of the pre-Hispanic [and ...] saw little need for the growing idealization of the Indian roots of Latin American culture, seeing it as a negation of the realities of contemporary existence' (Baddeley and Fraser 1989: 84).

His epic fresco series *American Civilisation* painted in the unlikely conservative location of Dartmouth College, New Hampshire (1932-1934), exemplifies Orozco's perspective on humanity. In the panel *Gods of the Modern World* (1932) (fig. 2.14), the artist employs the *calavera* figure, who by definition has no skin and is therefore entirely free of racial categorisation. The artist criticises lifeless forms of knowledge predicated on power structures and it could be argued he is critiquing the containment of intellectuals, such as Gamio by the post-revolutionary state.

The ritually garbed male skeletons in this picture are lined up on ceremony witnessing the birth of a skeleton with a hat to symbolise academic achievement or the props of ritual status. The locked doors, grey books and baby skeletons locked in class cases suggest the reproduction of a closed and pointless system of knowledge which feeds on itself. The bearer of the 'child' is given the head of a statue to emphasise the inhumanity of her role. Her neck is broken, but this does not prevent her from fulfilling her ideological function of

reproducing the creed. The burning background and dramatic gravestone grey indicate destruction and a living death. The books appear as stone dead weights as if the knowledge within them is severe and permanently sealed. Orozco was criticising an ossified academicism and false gods of power and status. Rivera similarly critiques elitist education and celebrates socialist education in murals as a way of redeeming the 'Indian'. In contrast, in the 1950s, Siqueiros employed the theme of equality in education as a powerful liberator in *The People and the University, the University for the People* (1952-1956).

Orozco despised the wholesale romanticisation of the historic Mexico and clearly holds modernisation and civilisation to be akin to Westernisation. A central theme of the mural series *American Civilisation* is the *Myth of Quetzalcoatl*. True to his eclectic and contradictory style, the artist depicts scenes of the prehispanic past with an ambiguous message. He is at once in accordance with the glorification of the Aztec past, which is a central feature of Mexican *indigenismo*, as the mural venerates the prehispanic man-god and, on the other hand, he depicts prehispanic people as ignorant and barbaric. In the 'American Civilisation' mural series, Orozco employs the figure of Quetzalcóatl as a hero who attempts to civilise the 'Indian' world. In this image of Quetzalcóatl, Orozco simultaneously commemorates and validates an indigenous belief and legend and shows the rejection and departure of the hero 'in order to curse human ingratitude [as...] it is the people who are responsible for the iniquitous expulsion of Quetzalcóatl' (Rodríguez 1969: 345). Contrary to Rivera's glorification of the 'masses', Orozco depicts the crowd as hostile or blind herds whose lives are dictated by corrupt leaders and

base forces, symbolised by writhing serpents and the demon Tezcatlipoca in the Departure of Quetzalcoatl (fig. 2.15).

Whereas *indigenismo* presented the Conquest as a cruel, barbarous slaughter of noble Mesoamerican culture, Orozco sanctioned the acts of the conquistadors, as he emphasised ‘the barbarity and cruelty of the native world’, and therefore ‘he was able to justify those who came to put an end to this “barbarity” ’ (Rodríguez 1969: 349). In this fashion, other sections of *American Civilisation* portray Prehispanic Mexico as boldly satirised rather than romanticised. The artist depicts, *Ancient Human Sacrifice* (fig. 2.16) in the second panel showing the Aztec rite as ‘utter savagery’ (Keen 1985: 531). This graphic depiction shows statuesque men with mask-like faces enacting ritualised-violence on a splayed figure. The artificial visages and rigid muscular forms accentuate the inhumanity of the figures. The symmetrical order of the composition, suggests that the bloodshed is organised and the figures are brutally desensitised. In this mural series, in a panel entitled *Latin America*, Orozco also portrays a ‘barbaric’, materialistic twentieth-century fatality; an anonymous man falls dead smothered under a pile of money and a high ranking soldier brandishes his knife above the back of a revolutionary. In another panel called *Modern Human Sacrifice* (fig. 2.17), the ‘unknown soldier’ lies suffocated by a flag. As these ‘cruel sacrifices’ reappear in the modern era, it is clear that Orozco sees the traits of prehispanic culture as hideous ‘no por ser indios sino por ser humanos’ (Paz 1994 [1986]: 236).

Fernández notes how Orozco’s talent for satire displayed in these murals was based on integrity rather than negativity:

El conjunto es como una sabia orquestación que produce tonos solemnes, trágicos o desgarradoramente sarcásticos, pero no un sarcasmo negativo que opere igual sobre el bien y sobre el mal, no, es un sarcasmo dirigido a la falsedad, a la corrupción, a todo lo apócrifo y envilecido. (1956: 61)

This strongly-politicised historical critique of the indigenous past along with the uncivilised acts of modern warfare, contradicts the fact that in his autobiography, Orozco states that the purpose of a painting should be a historical phenomenon in itself, rather than an interpretation of history:

A painting should not be a commentary but the fact itself, not a reflection but the source of light, not an interpretation but the very thing to be interpreted. It should not imply any theory of anecdote, story or history, of any kind. (Orozco quoted in Charlot 1963: 239)

This view is in stark contradistinction to Rivera, who painted an historical epic in Mexico's National Palace, which is the main focus of this thesis. However, Orozco's contradictory attitudes towards representations of nation, history and the indigenous derived from the fact that the artist 'was born, grew up and matured in a period of confusion and contradictions' of base passions and high ideals (Rodríguez 1969: 356). He reflected the socio-political environment in focussed detail '[l]ike a seismograph' (Rodríguez 1969: 356) rather than through sweeping generalisation as Rivera. Therefore, one could

argue that Orozco's vision was a more nuanced reflection of Mexican history. The complexity of his often-contradictory fusion of perspectives is largely a reflection of the chaotic political legacy of the Mexican Revolution and concurrent continuities and ruptures with the colonial past.

Siqueiros: Forward-Looking Activist

Siqueiros neither denied nor mythologised the plight of the Mexican people, his response was passionately political. His treatment of the representation of the indigenous people of Mexico was inextricably interlinked with his forward-looking stance as a Marxist political activist. Reed observed that:

Probably nowhere in modern art are the tensions of a world in transition and the conflicts born of challenging social patterns more dynamically reflected than in the murals of David Alfaro Siqueiros. (1960: 100)

Siqueiros was continually embroiled in political conflicts and dedicated to social change. The artist explained how the extreme conditions of fighting during the Revolution brought him into contact with 'the Mexican people, with the Mexican peasants, with the Mexican Indians, with the men of Mexico', describing this time of civil war as 'intensely human' and as 'the first antecedent of the humanistic concept of art' (1975[1945]: 11). He later claimed that the contact he made with the idiosyncrasies of the people as well as Mexican geography and archaeology, popular arts and 'the whole of Mexican culture' caused

him to abandon any aspirations to be a Parisian bohemian (1975[1945]: 11). In Barcelona in the early 1920s, Siqueiros published 'Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la nueva generación americana' in *Vida Americana* where he advised that artists should '[a]doptemos [la] energía sintética' of Mesoamerican art 'sin llegar, naturalmente, a las lamentables reconstrucciones arqueológicas (*indianismo, primitivismo, americanismo*) tan de moda entre nosotros' (Siqueiros 1989 [1921]: 322).

Siqueiros was committed to serious, political struggle despite any personal cost to himself. Paz (1979-1980) states that his priority was politics rather than art, although Siqueiros himself draws distinct parallels between art and armed political struggle. As Rodríguez points out, Siqueiros 'had been involved to a much greater extent than either of his colleagues in the revolutionary and economic struggles of his time' (1969: 360). A letter to his friend, the author, María Teresa León de Alberti, from the front-line in Spain, where he was fighting in the Spanish Civil War, dated April 27 1938, characterises the artist's fighting spirit: 'as you know there is nothing better in life than a problem. The harder and the more complicated the better' (quoted in Siqueiros 1975 [1945]: 49). In the same letter he draws parallels between the arts of war and painting:

Well war is like modern art (hardly as envisaged in my obsessive, solitary attempts)—it is mechanics and physics, chemistry and geometry, geography and cadence, it is equilibrium and synthesis. War, like art can express in one go both the positive and negative of human nature. So there

is nothing surprising in my returning to my original profession, the one I practised in my already somewhat distant youth. (quoted in Siqueiros 1975 [1945]: 49)

Siqueiros's outspoken, fighting spirit always approached his subjects in an uncompromising manner, and his representation of the 'Indian' was no exception to this. In New York in 1936, he founded the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop which was closely affiliated with the Communist Party. He continued to produce stark and disturbing visions of indigenous poverty to illustrate social realities of class and racial divisions. He combined a socially motivated art with experimental techniques which he regarded as the appropriate artistic method for ideological strategies based on a vision of modernity as a progressive force. Siqueiros was insistent on the need to create a new aesthetic in keeping with modern technology, to herald a new era. In the 1930s he introduced the use of up-to-date materials into his resources as an artist. Amongst these were industrial paints and spray guns. In 1936, in his experimental workshop, he introduced these innovative techniques and materials to a generation of young North American artists including Jackson Pollock (Baddeley and Fraser 1989: 86). In 1936 Siqueiros explored the unique properties of pyroxylin, fully allowing 'accidental' effects due to the chemical reactions of the paint, but unlike Jackson Pollock, he depicted real subjects rather than abstract imagery (Oles 1997: 176). His combining of political realities with modern materials can be seen in a number of his portrayals of the social actualities of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

Child-Mother (1936) (fig. 2.18), was based on a photographic postcard, a 1920s image which Tibol identified as by Hugo Brehme (fig. 2.19) (Oles 1997: 176). The depiction of the child taking care of a smaller child portrays the tragedy of social inequality experienced by the indigenous peoples of Mexico. In contrast to Brehme's smiling subject Siqueiros's bleak and moving image of the child-mother depicts the harsh actuality of real post-revolutionary indigenous life. The child taking a traditionally adult role blurs the generational boundaries and depicts the brutal realities of hardship and poverty. This harsh theme juxtaposed with the white dress, traditionally associated with purity, creates a poignantly stark contrast. Siqueiros's photograph differs from Brehme's photograph in a way which ironically enhances the realism of the subject. The blood red, yellow and burning oranges of the 'accidental' effects of pyroxylin add to the sense of chaos and tragedy that enhances the sense of difficulty of the girl's situation. Her half-smile and anxious expression, indicate that the usual innocent contentedness traditionally associated with childhood is absent or stolen.

The theme of the indigenous is portrayed in a stark culturally-specific representation of social hardship in order to communicate the consequences of a political reality structured on class-race and gender power relationships. In the 1930s Siqueiros had explored the theme of motherhood in many works, the most famous of which being *Peasant-Mother* (1931) (fig. 2.20), where Siqueiros depicts the destitution and defencelessness of an 'Indian' woman. Ades observes that this picture demonstrates that the artist was conscious 'that Mexico was still in a vulnerable transitional state, that the old order had not been defeated

and that the worker and peasant were still exploited' (1989: 201). The mother and child are portrayed in a Madonna-and-child like unity indicating integrity and a transcendence above the ugly facts of history. The background of an arid desert portrays them as part of the natural environment of Mexico whilst simultaneously suffering the harshness of this barren terrain which offers them no respite. The cacti are characteristic of the Mexican landscape into which the figures merge. In both these depictions of motherhood, Siqueiros highlighted the abject poverty of both the urban and rural poor and employed emotive subject matter in order to communicate his political perspective.

Siqueiros's political convictions and his embracing of modernity caused him to be highly sceptical of the glorification of *mexicanidad* in all artistic spheres:

Where will this Mexicanisation of style get us? What has remained of previous Mexican neo-Aztec or neo-colonial architecture? Nothing, there is nothing we can defend at this time. [...] The same thing will happen with the indigenous trend in our architecture today. (1975 [1945]: 208)

Siqueiros criticises the tendency of Mexican artists to become exclusively "Mexicanist" rather than political. When Siqueiros did approach the Mexican icons of the indigenous past, he politicised these images through allegory and adaptation to a modern idiom. Examples of this transformation are to be found in *Cuauhtémoc against the Myth* (1944) (fig. 2.21). In this work Siqueiros presents a

counter-historical vision of the defeat of the Aztecs. European history teaches that the Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc (1502-1525) failed to unite the indigenous city-states of the Valley of Mexico against the Spanish after the expulsion of Cortés. Here the European conquistadors are represented by a horse that falls under the strength of Cuauhtémoc. Siqueiros transforms the disempowering defeat of the last Aztec leader, into a victory of indigenous peoples against the Spanish colonisers. This representation of an alternative outcome to history creates a powerful counter narrative to the conventional wisdom of history, shifting the European cultural perspective of the Conquest. Rodriguez observes that Siqueiros presents the fight of the Aztec emperor against the Spaniards as unequal as the Spaniards had 'gunpowder, horses, the dagger and the Cross' (1969: 382). In this respect, Siqueiros was providing a critique of the cultural *mythologies* upon which Mexican nationalism was based as he combines the armour of Spanish conqueror and Aztec emperor thus deconstructing the binary opposition of the two leaders, as both were part of imperialist empires.

Siqueiros had earlier described the process of the indigenous people of Mexico becoming proletarian as a 'metamorphosis' with an 'epic nature' (175 [1945]: 188). In 1921 he wrote:

Let us, for our part, go back to the work of the ancient inhabitants of our valleys, the Indian painters and sculptors (*Mayas, Aztecs, Incas*, etc.). Our climatic proximity to them will help us assimilate the constructive vitality of their work. They demonstrate a fundamental knowledge of nature,

which can serve as a point of departure for us. (Siqueiros 1989 [1921]: 323)

Later, Siqueiros became a strident critic against the cultural mythology of *indigenismo*. This critique was strongly expressed in his powerful indictment of the racist and objectifying components of ethnographic study. *Ethnography* (1939) (fig. 2.35) has been described as ‘the only work by Siqueiros in the 1930s with an identifiable precolumbian element’ as it shows an Olmec mask depicted ‘with almost photographic accuracy’ (Oles 1997: 193). The painting can clearly be read as a critical evaluation of ethnography as the peasant’s identity is shrouded by the exotic mask, just as the everyday concerns of the indigenous were deflected by an overemphasis on the monuments, artefacts and treasures of the past. The use of sombre shadow and a turbulent sky create a sense of impending doom which characterises Siqueiros’s critique of the apolitical features of *indigenismo*. The mask shrouds the true features and identity of the peasant and silences him as it is wooden and immovable. His hands are held as if in supplication or perhaps handcuffed which both suggest restriction and imprisonment.

These three starkly differing approaches to the representation of the ‘Indian’ and to *indigenista* discourses, display the fact that mural painting was variously ‘determined by the conditions and ideals of its period’ (Rodríguez 1969: 160). Natalia Majluf points out that ‘[e]l indigenismo no podía ser concebido fuera de la idea de la nación’ (1997: 248). The vision of the indigenous peoples of Mexico in the nationalist discourse projected in Rivera’s National Palace Mural, will

now be analysed through a close reading of the work in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

Chapter Three: National Palace and Nationalist Mythology

Was this not the National Palace? Was it not fitting, then, that the whole nation should find itself mirrored on these palace walls? (Wolfe 1939: 298)

In 1929 Rivera began the painting on the walls of the grandiose National Palace in the heart of Mexico City, the most high profile centre of power in the country. The central government commissioned the work at a time when the artist's national and international standing was reaching its peak.²² He attempts to portray the history of the Mexican Nation in the 125 metres covered by the mural (fig. 1.0). What can be seen in the 'reflection' of history on the National Palace walls is refracted through the eye of the historically specific beholder. A further question is posed: can the subaltern be seen? In the reflected distortions of a powerfully projected socio-cultural vision the subaltern may in fact be rendered invisible. To discern between the artificial and the real the self-reflexive viewer must return the gaze of the projected image and read into the invisible spaces, the absences, silences which reveal so much about the gulf between the seductive glamour of rhetoric and the often disturbing reality which is more comfortably denied.

The process of socio-political representation will implicitly involve simultaneous misrepresentation, as such a generalised view of history as an attempt to portray the whole history of a nation and in which

²² Certain critics point out that 'an artist's relationship with patrons is not one-sided' and Rivera's work strongly exemplifies this (Alpers and Baxandall 1994: 7).

five centuries of historical events and representative key figures are condensed into a limited space. The production of a cultural text or material object such as the mural is circumscribed by a particular viewing perspective which will project an image which is framed within culturally-specific borders. The overall focus of this study will be to analyse Rivera's representation of race which is inextricably interlinked with the presentation of the post-revolutionary Mexican nation and the idea of the people. The triptych mural series in the National Palace stairway is grandly entitled *History of the Mexican People*. (1929-1935) (fig 1.0) The North/Right Panel representing *Prehispanic Mexico* was painted in 1929, the West Wall/Central Panel *History of Mexico from the Conquest to 1930* from 1929-1930 and the South/Left Panel *Mexico Today and in the Future* from 1934-1935 (fig 3.1a). The Patio Corridor (painted from 1942 – 1951) depicts different Mexican civilisations: *The Great City of Tenochtitlán (the Aztec capital)*, *The Tarascan Civilisation*, *The Zapotec Civilisation*, *The Totonac Civilisation* and *The Huastec Civilisation*. Various aspects of the Corridor fresco series will be referred to, in order to enhance understanding of the triptych *History of the Mexican People*, but this section of the mural will not be considered in the main analysis which focuses on aesthetic and socio-political factors between 1929 and 1935.

The ambitious task of distilling historical representation is ubiquitously problematic as it is selective with myriad possibilities inevitably excluded. The analysis will simultaneously recognise the universal and particular features of the projected imagery. Rodríguez's words below highlight the contribution of Rivera's work in

strengthening the national consciousness. He also points out that Rivera's work contains both universal and Mexican elements.

Diego Rivera is the most Mexican and at the same time the most universal of all contemporary Mexican painters. The work of others may manifest more of the terrible tragedy of Mexico, but no one has done so much to strengthen the national consciousness of Mexico as Diego Rivera, painter of the Mexican people. (Rodríguez 1969: 310)

The mural entitled *History of the Mexican People* is situated in the National Palace (fig. 3.2) and, as the title suggests, depicts great themes from the history of the Mexican nation. As outlined in the introduction, this thesis examines the representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico within the context of nationalist discourse. I employ Smith's universal theory of ethno-symbolism which notes both the historical roots of nationalism and the integral ethnic element in the construction of nationalist socio-mythology.

In Chapters Three to Five I undertake a close-reading of the National Palace Mural Triptych. Chapter Three focuses solely on the Central Panel entitled *History of Mexico from the Conquest to 1930*. Chapters Four and Five are restricted to *Prehispanic Mexico* and *Mexico of Today and in the Future* respectively. The sequence that is followed is not chronological, but rather tracks the path the observer may take on visiting the mural. The work will firstly be considered as a visual experience, moving onto its historical context then considering the theoretical dimension of the representation of race in the specific

period during which the mural was created. The description of the work which tracks the path of the viewer will therefore be initially fragmented.

To follow through this complex work logically it is constructive to divide the whole composition into nine zones (named 1-5e) for the Central Panel. The Right and Left Panels will be divided into three further zones each, zones 6-8 and 9-12 respectively.²³(figs. 3.1a, 4.1a, 5.1a). The mural will be divided in this way to achieve a clearer understanding of the meticulous detail of the work. It is important to note that there are many different vantage points from which we could choose to divide the mural space and the Prownian method, defined in the introduction, has been chosen for completeness. As discussed, this methodology considers aesthetic, historical and socio-political dimensions following the stages of *description*, *deduction* and *speculation*.

The Zones of the Central Panel: (fig. 3.1a)

Zone 1 contains the triangular section formed on two sides by the echoed line structuring the two stairways that split off from the first landing. The pictorial components of the mural are ordered to utilise the architectural structure of the split stairway and its substantial qualities. The base of the Central Panel follows a v-shaped winged structure following the movement up both of the parallel flights of stairs to the next floor. This triangular valley frames the base of the middle section and of the crowd of fighting figures. Horses climb up

²³ Zones 6-11 will be discussed in the relevant sections of Chapter Four and Five.

the walls complementing and vivifying the lines of the stair wall, as it becomes an implicit part of the pictorial movement. The figures in the mural fit into the architectural structure and their movements are choreographed as if they inhabit this real space unencumbered by its restrictions. The base of the plinth upon which the eagle perches forms the topside of zone 1. The trapezium shape of this platform forms zone 2 and includes the historical figures and symbols that inhabit this space. Zone 3 flanks the pedestal and contains figures in more upright positions along with the fire on the left of the viewer and the cannon shot on the right. Zone 4 contains more standing figures in simple, white, clothing; the majority are wearing hats and have their backs to the observer. I will number the arches as zones 5a-e from the central followed by the two flanking arches and finally the two outer areas.

The Architectural Setting of the Mural

Chapter Three will move through the mural following the path of the observer from the Zócalo up the steps enclosed in an arched colonnade, across the first landing and ultimately up the winged stairway to the balcony view. The description of aesthetic responses will follow the Prownian model in which a generalised reaction is drawn from the particular. Prown states that emotional 'subjective reactions, difficult but by no means impossible to articulate, tend to be significant to the extent that they are generally shared' (Prown 2001: 82). This premise will be followed with full awareness that viewing positions are polyvalent and that a generalisation of viewing response is open to critique.

The implicit and explicit intentions of painter and patron create their own messages as well as the imaginative work required of the viewer. This audience participation is demanding and the socio-psychical perspective of the spectator must be taken into consideration. I use the term 'privileged' or 'educated' observer to define a viewing position which is evidently distant from the many possible 'readers' of the mural. This way of framing the work is unavoidably distinct from the perspective of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, the majority of whom were illiterate in the post-revolutionary period.

The mural is unframed in the conventional sense of easel art but in another sense it is extensively framed in the real setting of the buildings. The character of fresco fuses the painting with the Palace and situates the work and viewer in an imaginative space which is implicitly part of the real space. As the onlooker takes this path through the socio-historical representation she or he experiences a reframing of Mexican history in a site loaded with historical significance connecting past, present and future.

In observing the large space of the mural the spectator is continually moving through changing distances, unusual angles and fluctuations in perspective. The frame is taken into account as an integral part of the building and this sense of enmeshment of different dimensions is enhanced by the medium of fresco itself. In authentic fresco technique the surface is firstly covered with one layer of plaster onto a wall. The artist or the plasterer trowels or 'throws' up to two more coats of specially made mortar composed of aged or lime putty quicklime which has been slaked with water and kept in storage for a

year or two to improve its plasticity. Sand and sometimes marble dusts, each in its own carefully measured proportion are also added to develop the texture of the material. The first or scratch coat (*trullisatio*) and the second or brown coat (*arricatio*) are applied and allowed to set. The plaster dries so quickly that only one section of the composition may be completed at any one time. Each fresh (*fresco*) section is described in Italian as a *giornata* (day's work). The nature of *fresco* therefore effects both the production of the work and its resultant qualities. Separate workers do the various simultaneous tasks of; preparing the wall, grinding the pigment, and shifting the scaffolding. Folgarait describes the painter as 'the "finisher" of this unit of production' (1998: 30).

The architectural setting of the mural is integral to understanding its substance, as it is part of one of the most famous buildings in the historical centre of Mexico City. The National Palace (fig. 3.2) faces the east of the stately *Zócalo* which is one of the power centres of the metropolis. The Palace is a huge colonial building stretching across the whole of the east side of the second largest square in the world. During most of the period the mural was painted (1929-1935) the National Palace housed the presidential offices, which were moved when Cárdenas came into power in 1934, just before the triptych was completed. In the centre of this massive concrete plaza flies a giant Mexican flag. Everyday at six in the morning and evening the standard is ceremoniously raised and lowered. The majestic Cathedral creates the northern border of the Central Square whilst shops and other government buildings make up the south and west sides. Facing the National Palace, the observer can see three portals. Above the central

gate of the grand facade of the building is the bell rung by Father Miguel Hidalgo y Castilla²⁴ in 1810 when he proclaimed the *Grito de Dolores* which is famed as the moment when Mexico declared independence.

Moving through the main entrance of the National Palace we face the expansive main courtyard (fig. 3.3) that is surrounded by three floors with open arches, through which the pedestrian can view the square and central fountain. Turning left from the main door, the mural covers the three walls of the large stairway leading from the central courtyard up to the first floor. On first approaching the lower stairs the painting is partially obscured by the frame of an arched colonnade of more or less eight metres in height. Gradually the Central Panel becomes more visible as the viewer ascends the stairway through the archway.

First View: Mexico from the Conquest to 1930

The stairs are approximately three metres wide and begin just beyond the base of the arch. Standing at the foot of this arch the viewer can see sixteen steps leading up to the first landing. From this vantage point the white stone stairs take up a third of the visual space. The mid section of the Central Panel makes up the other two thirds of the view. Due to its positioning within the architectural space the first sight of the mural gives the impression that it is under the large archway of the portico (fig. 3.4).

²⁴ Miguel Hidalgo (1753-1811) the 'rebellious' priest was known as a defender of the oppressed, a leader and icon of the independence movement.

Once reaching the balcony landing the viewer can see the whole of the Central Panel *Mexico from the Conquest to 1930*; this is the largest wall of the triptych and is around nine metres high and twenty-two long. The arches are painted into the mural and echo the shape of the vaulted ceiling, blending into the architectural logic. The symmetry of ornate sculpted columns painted into the mural is seen clearly on the initial approach to the first landing up the lower flight of stairs. The initial arched colonnade shape therefore is echoed by five fresco arches, flanked by two panels (fig. 3.5). This enclosed space gives the impression that the mural is bound as an implicit part of the building in which it is housed. The concrete reality of the colonial architecture merges with the imaginary world depicted in the mural space. On both the first landing (fig 3.6) and the balcony point the observer is aware of both of the two side walls. The Right Panel and the Left Panel are both 7.5 metres high and 9 metres wide.

The narrative of this Central Wall can be read in many ways; for example starting from the lower, right corner beginning with the depiction of the Spanish Conquest of 1521. Pictorial depictions, partly factual and partly fictitious are joined to real architecture and the effect of this is a powerful all-pervasive experience as the viewer follows the path across the Zócalo into the National Palace and up the stairs.

Zone 1: Battle Scene

In zone 1 (fig. 3.7), there are three clearly distinguishable groups taking part in the action of the battle scene. Five armoured men are on horseback, all with their visors down except for the central figure who is bearded and wearing a determined expression facing in profile

out of the crowd. Six figures are wearing a different sort of armour; four of these are facing outwards from this central triangle confronting a mixed gathering of men with both dark and paler skin aiming arrows at them. Spears and arrows criss-cross the scene forming smaller triangles within the larger space. Bare-chested, dark skinned fighters are poised in battle stances against both the armoured warriors and those dressed in animal skins. At the base of the composition, to the right of the observer, horses appear to be climbing up the incline. The ascending stair wall forms the hill they scale, trampling figures underfoot who are dressed in animal skins.

On the far left of zone 1 a figure scrambles up on his knees and an armoured man is depicted raping an Indian woman (fig. 3.8). Looking more closely into the crowd of combatants behind the yellow lines of the spears, a dozen or so figures are compacted into this space some are wearing animal masks, others carry bows and arrows and wear their hair tied up.

Dramatic Discomfort

The emotional response to the initial contact with the mural is intensely dramatic and disquieting. The observer interacts with the opening scene as a participant with the physical immediacy of the struggles of Mexican history. On turning left, to the main stairwell, the actual space of the building's architecture merges with a dramatic influx of colour and line intensified by a sense of compression under the shadowy curve of the archway. The initial view of the pell-mell figures of the battle through the colonnade dominates the aesthetic experience from the outset. There is a sense that the path is leading

inevitably into the action of combat and tunnel vision is enforced through the enclosing protection of the arch. The opening moment of contact is an unavoidable interaction with the graphically depicted struggle of war. The observer moves rapidly up towards the battle into the symphony of vibrant colour and the uplifting movement of line. This experience is accentuated during the first few spectacular moments in which the progress of the observer is initiated through this compacted vision of history. The pathway of the stairwell leads the viewer purposefully into the figures entangled in the drama of combat. The momentum is precipitated by the form of the stairs as the observer is given a sense of ascending consciously into the dynamic action of vividly coloured assailants and the threatening clatter of horses' hooves and weapons. The imagination is stimulated to hear the gaping mouths of animal war-masks scream out piercing cries of terror and victory. The warmth of deep red, brown and yellow clashes with frosty silver and white and vivifies the dramatic tensions of the scene with the stark impact of opposites meeting. The blocked colour is devoid of the subtleties of chiaroscuro and, therefore, the bold contrasts appear more starkly defined.

The winged borders of the stairway are reflected by the upsurge of the sweeping lines of spears and swords. The observer's ascension animates the figures amplifying the movement upwards whilst feeling a crescendo of emotional intensity with a more intimate experience of the drama, cruelty and violence of combat. The rough texture of the mural gives it an earthy quality as if it is part of the very ground. As the fresco plaster is fused to the material of the building, it appears to be part of the stonework of the stairwell. This physical grittiness of

matter adds to the imaginative sense of being involved with the reality of a heroic battle. Whilst moving into further interaction with the mural space, the experience draws the viewer into a sense of intermingling with the depicted crowd which, with the quality of a projected film still, gives the illusion of being part of the Palace. The action is freeze-framed but somehow retains the feature of a cinematic image encouraging a willing suspension of disbelief in which the depicted scenes and characters appear present at the moment of viewing. The stillness gives the historical moment a certain constant quality. In the images of the national palace emblazoned on the national hegemonic consciousness this unchanging aspect enriches the cultural currency of the representations.

Mexican Mastery of Italian Masters

The sense of historical continuity with the combination of stillness and fusion with the colonial architecture of the historical site is further reinforced through Rivera's employment of theme, form and colour from his intense observations and sketches of the Italian Masters. Rivera returned to a new era in Mexico: he had left during the end of the *Porfiriato* and his home country was so changed due to the continual upheavals of the revolution that it appeared to him as 'virtually a foreign land' (Marnham 1998: 165).

During his travels in Italy from January 1920 to July 1921, Rivera studied intensely and 'completed more than three-hundred sketches from the frescoes of the masters and from life' (Rivera 1991: 72). The fresco technique was perfected by Giotto (1267-1337) at the end of the

thirteenth century. The influence of the Italian master Paolo Uccello, (1397-1475) is a noticeable feature of zone 1.

The Uccello tempera panel (fig 3.9)²⁵ shows the Central Panel of the triptych *The Rout of San Romano* painted in the mid-fifteenth century and housed in the Uffizi, Florence; the two other panels are in the Louvre and the National Gallery. Rivera was greatly inspired by the aforementioned sketching trip to Italy:

There was so much to see in Italy—the marvelous treasures of Michelangelo and Giotto, Paulo Uccello, Pierro de la Francesca and Antonello de la Messina. I could not bear to go to bed. (Rivera 1991: 71)

Rivera's depiction of the battle scene, zone 1, has evidently drawn on aspects of form and thematic content from Uccello's work. In both the National Palace combat scene depicting the fall of Tenochtitlán and *The Rout of San Romano* the fighters are inward looking which gives the sense that they are intensely involved in the enclosed skirmish. The fighters pose in intermingled stances and have a carefully constructed, haphazard appearance which enhances the sense of the unpredictability of battle. The repeated triangular patterns and the conventional types of soldiers entangled in active battle and drastic poses, intensify the impression of chaos. Some horses, soldiers and warriors are fallen while others are rearing or fighting with their limbs bent at different angles. As both Rivera's and Uccello's battle scenes

²⁵ The technique of fresco is a name given to a variety of wall paintings but should strictly be reserved for those in which the painting is on wet plaster and absorbs the pigment into the mural surface.

are composed to be seen from a certain distance, the field of vision expands and closes in according to the stance of the viewer. The triangular framing of the crossing of spears and the acute angles of elbows, knees and rearing horses create a sense of enclosure. The anonymity of figures with hidden features creates indeterminacy and further similarities between the two battle scenes. The similarities between the two pictures suggest that the specific moment selected by Rivera to depict the starting point in his sequence is characterized to a greater degree by a generalised classical battle theme than Mexican historical specificity or accuracy. The importance of the Uccello panel in the history of Western art suggests that Rivera may have been paying homage to the Italian master and his famous, innovative use of perspective.

The illustration of a contested site of struggle and chaos in zone 1 contrasts with the sense of tranquillity in the comparatively poised stasis of the figures in the flanking panels depicting *Prehispanic Mexico* and *Mexico of Today and in the Future* (figs. 4.1 and 5.1). The logic of the narrative and the placing of this scene in a mood-changing sequence advancing from turmoil to tranquillity, suggests that the disorder is transient, a passing moment in the process of history.

Traditional Themes: New Visions?

In *History of the Mexican People* Rivera resurrected the genre of history painting which was employed in an idiosyncratic manner in Latin America in the second half of the nineteenth century. History painting was a significant aspect of training in the academies such as

the Royal academy of San Carlos²⁶ in Mexico where Rivera studied between 1898 and 1907 prior to his apprenticeship in Europe. Ades describes this genre as ‘one particular aspect of academic theory and practice that took deep root in the new world’ stating that ‘[t]he energy in the treatment of the great subjects of both contemporary and ancient American history (the subjects were prolific), and the use of traditional European themes to carry contemporary significance, combined with an increasingly unorthodox mixture of classicism and realism, give academic painting in the second half of the nineteenth century in Latin America an unusual interest (Ades 1989: 30). Rivera’s subject matter in *History of the Mexican People* revives the tradition of academic history painting which was on the way out of fashion in European artistic circles of the mid-eighteenth century (Ades 1989). The interchangeable elements in the pictorial narratives, between Uccello’s tempera, renaissance depiction and Rivera’s ‘revolutionary’ fresco, create a cross-cultural hybrid style. The vast Italian public art works depicted scenes of religious significance to the largely illiterate population. Rivera intended to depict an all-encompassing history of the Mexican people, to whom his work was supposed to be addressed. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the Mexican population were also

²⁶ In Mexico, the Royal Academy of the Three Noble Arts of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture was founded in 1785. From the beginning, the curriculum followed neo-classical principles; students were taught to draw first from casts and then from life, over the course of twelve years. This institution later became the San Carlos Academy which was established as the first official art school in Latin America. Academies were established as part of a programme of reform, to foster a country’s intellectual and artistic life and the founders of the academies of art in the new countries of America shared commercially based ideas of European origin and had nationalistic concerns. The first president of the Royal Academy in London, Sir Joshua Reynolds, argued that such institutions were integral to pragmatic, mercantile considerations and of national pride; they were suitable for the integrity of a commercial and educated nation (Ades 1989: 29).

illiterate in 1929. Rivera utilised many of the visual techniques and themes collected on his extensive travels. The fact that Rivera's eclectic style is rooted in European techniques affects the representation of the indigenous, as it constitutes part of a visual symbolic hegemony with an international audience. The medium and iconography contain simultaneously aspects of the Eurocentric and a hybrid re-appropriation, which is intended to represent the indigenous people of Mexico with their interests at heart.

The Conquest as Point of Origin

The privileged, historically-literate observer adds another dimension to the experience of the mural, which fuses an aesthetic and discursive response, adding an emotional charge to the history lesson contained therein. The dramatic action includes two powerful leaders, Hernán Cortés (1485-1547) in the epicentre-the bearded man in metallic armour and a figure likely to represent Cuauhtémoc (1502-1525) the last Aztec emperor who holds up a sling shot and is dressed as an eagle warrior (fig. 3.10). In combining the emotional reaction with the historical drama the observer imaginatively partakes in the 'noble' struggle of anti-heroes and heroes from opposing worlds. The violence of the scene is depicted as controlled by the Spanish conquistadors who are on horseback and wearing armour. Cortés who led the overthrow of the Aztec civilisation in 1521 is a notorious symbol of brutality, command and domination over the indigenous population. The atrocity of the rape, and also the slaughter of an Aztec jaguar knight by armed horsemen clearly depict the conquistadors in an infamous light. This notoriety reflects the Mexican view of Cortés.

There are no monuments or statues in celebration of the legacy of Cortés in Mexico as 'he is regarded as a villain' (Kirkwood 2000: 217). Baddeley points out that the moment of the Conquest is often portrayed in sexual terms which reinforce ideas of the exoticised passive woman being dominated by the active conquistador (1998: 585). The 'Indian' woman is linked on a signification chain with the Mexican fatherland, and she therefore acts as a symbol for the violated nation.

A closer look at zone 1 reveals 'Indians' fighting Aztecs who are in animal costumes showing that the battle is not a simple conflict of race upon race. Tlaxcalan allies are shown fighting with the Spanish against the Aztecs, who are presented in animal war costumes including eagle and jaguar knights. The Aztecs were an elite civilization with many enemies and Cortés took advantage of the infighting of different city states by forging alliances with dominated groups and exploiting the internal rifts within Mesoamerica. The observer's initial contact with the mural is therefore one of being drawn into a dramatic and unsettling moment of Mexican history. The Manichean binary of heroes pitted against anti-heroes creates a simplified scene which distils the history of the conquest into a battle between good and evil. This battle was not, however, divided along racial lines as the Tlaxcalans are shown as fighting with the enemy and complicit in the destruction that followed.

Ritual and *la Revolución*

Benjamin reminds us that the Calles regime in power at this time emphasised the rhetoric of the ongoing nature of the revolution and

took official responsibility for commemorating *la Revolución* of past, present and future (Benjamin 2000: 68). He also states that ‘the mural movement had no ideological guidance from the Ministry of Education or any other part of the government’ (Benjamin 2000: 75). Despite this apparent autonomy, many of the messages expounded by the mural’s representations echo those of governmental rhetoric. The theme of past, present and future in the mural is evident in the three titles of the triptych; *Prehispanic Mexico*, *From the Conquest to 1930* and *Mexico Today and Tomorrow* respectively.

The political imperative of the government to create a unified Mexican nation is reflected in the organisation of the mural into these three distinct time zones. Calles attempted to generate an image of the unification of all revolutionaries in an effort to solder together diverse factions of Mexican society. It was thought necessary to recreate history, to reinscribe the past, present and the future in order to reinvent the image of the revolution. The site at the exact centre of power in the most high-profile area of the country was perfect for exhibiting this nationalist socio-mythological narrative. The governmental objective of creating an image-unified nation was drawn together into the solid matter of the concrete fortifications of the National Palace. The National Palace Mural was used to illustrate the 1935 *Guide to the History of Mexico: A Modern Interpretation*, written by Alonso Teja Zabre and published in Spanish, English and French by the Press of the Ministry of Public Affairs in Mexico. Wolfe explains that this book projected an image of strong identification with Rivera’s work: ‘Los críticos la calificaron de “Historia dieguina de México” y el autor reconoció la deuda con el pintor’ (Wolfe 1972: 27). Teja Zabre

clearly outlines the goals of the post-revolutionary government and advises the reader of their preferred ideological perspective: 'One must draw closer to reality, [and] specially stress tendencies towards nationalism, Indianism and agrarian reform' (1935: 346). He acknowledges the integral role played by 'Indianism' in the building of the nation:

Indianism demonstrates the recognition of a fact, for a long time almost entirely overlooked, that is the great mass of the Indian population constitutes the main part of culture maintained and upheld in the land of Mexico, and that contributions from outside cultures have not been fully incorporated into the culture of the Mexican land. This being so, the endeavour should be made rather than to incorporate the Indian into civilization," to "incorporate civilization into the Indian". (Teja Zabre 1935: 347)

A 'unifying' image, such as that presented in *The Guide to the History of Mexico*, is described by Smith in his universal theory of nationalist mythology. In *Myths and Memories of the Nation* Smith states that nationalism became a vehicle for rapid political transformation, mobilization and redrafting of the socio-cultural map through destruction of local and regional bonds, 'in the interests of the centre and the whole community' (Smith 1999: 61). Smith also asserts that '[h]istorically and sociologically, these myths emerge into the political daylight at certain junctures; these are usually periods of profound culture clash, and accelerated economic and social change'

(Smith 1999: 83). The meeting of two or more worlds depicted by Rivera in zone 1 is a stark clash of cultures famed in Mexican history as the moment a civilisation fell from the grace of a 'golden era'. The scene of combat in the mural displaces the internal conflicts of Mexican politics in the post-revolutionary decades to the era of the conquest almost five centuries earlier averting attention from the more contemporary divisions during the *Maximato*. One such rupture resulted from Calles's harsh measures in an attempt to contain the Catholic *Cristero*²⁷ wars (1926-1929) which raged against strict implementation of constitutional anticlerical laws. Governmental steps included the deportation of foreign priests, governmental registration of Mexican priests, murder of unarmed *campesinos*, scorched-earth tactics and enforced relocation of Indian communities. These measures served only to exacerbate the conflict which by 1929 boasted 50,000 supporters. Atrocities were committed on both sides. The image of a unified people with a history of struggle would be a political imperative in such a time of intense divisions.

The experience of viewing the mural provides an altered perception that has been likened to ritual (Folgarait 1998: 120). Folgarait describes the political stance of the Calles government and the gulf between rhetoric, such as that exemplified in Teja Zabre, and practice stating that '[t]he process active in Mexico at this time created the classic contradiction of a "revolutionary" government acting in a

²⁷ The Calles government aggressively legislated on the basis of the anticlerical articles of the 1917 Constitution. Defenders of the Catholic Church reacted by creating an organisation called the Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa (Liga). From 1926-1929 the Church directed a national strike, suspending religious rituals and services. Resistance also included warfare by the *Cristeros* whose battle cry was 'Viva Cristo Rey' (Long live Christ the King). The *Cristero* rebellion will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

counterrevolutionary manner' (Folgarait 1998: 120). Folgarait applies Nicos Poulantzas's work on a capitalist 'class state' which presents itself as a 'national political community' in which the ideology of a unified 'people' is employed to disguise the reality of class stratification (Poulantzas quoted in Folgarait 1998: 121). Folgarait's theory of the mural's ritual qualities and capacity to encourage a false vision of a unified nation has resonances with Roland Barthes theory of socio-cultural myth and Smith's nationalist ethno-symbolic myth. Barthes asserts that cultural *mythologies* have the capacity to consolidate ideological forms and disguise the gulf between rhetoric and practice as '[t]he bourgeoisie wants to keep reality without keeping the appearances' (Barthes 1972: 162). Smith's specific reference to the universal ethnic components of nationalist myth describes discrete elements which can be applied to the cultural 'text' of the mural and facilitate a decoding of the integral racial dimension of capitalist cultural *mythologies*.

The degenerate cruelty depicted in the battle scene in zone I resonates with one of the six rudiments described as present in all nationalist 'ethnic myths' (Smith 1999: 62). The facet in Smith's theory called 'A Myth of Decline, or *How We Fell into a State of Decay*' is characterised by a perception which diverges from a linear teleological idea of progress in stating that history temporarily regresses and relapses but will be set on course by the heroic martyrs who will release the nation from the yoke of barbarism (Smith 1999: 67). Smith uses a visual metaphor to describe the logic of this myth '[t]he tree never grows straight, the river always meanders, even turns back in erratic loops. But if seized with ethnic consciousness, men can

unbend the tree and set the river back on course' (Smith 1999: 67). The placement of the scene of conflict at the base of the composition underlines the sense of ascending out of the drama on climbing up to the balcony and leaving behind the intense experience of the disorder and violence of war. The battle scene of zone 1 can be seen as a visual allegory which harnesses such a moment of fall into decay and decline, when the people of Tenochtitlán were slaughtered, tortured and violated by invaders in contrast to the mythological tranquillity of past and future 'golden ages' as depicted in other focal points of the mural. In reality, cruelty, violence and the thirst for power and riches were no more restricted to any one nation or race when the Spanish defeated the Aztecs in 1521, than they were in 1929 when Rivera began the mural series. The idealisation of the displaced Aztec civilisation in zone 1 creates a dramatic depiction of the fall from splendour and glory into a degenerate state of colonialist cruelty and may descend into the pitfalls of reverse racism rather than a historically specific measured representation which considers the historical detail. Rivera himself notes that the spread of imported diseases by the conquistadors also destroyed a large proportion of the indigenous population and this was exacerbated by inhumane living conditions.²⁸ Nonetheless, the reductionist depiction in zone 1 which accentuates the cruelty of the Spaniards through rape and domination, neglects important facts and creates an obfuscating cultural mythology which merges strands of historical 'fact' with the distorting fictions of a one-sided

²⁸ '[...] en los primeros años de la conquista de Nueva España, la población indígena de ésta se redujo en una tercera parte, debido a las epidemias importadas por los conquistadores, de lo que había sido a la llegada de éstos' (Rivera 1999 [1938]: 209).

representational reductionism and may be a disguise for more pressing inconsistencies in governmental practice. Deflecting attention from more current national conflicts will preserve the hegemonic image of a harmonious, unified people with recognition of the rights of all races within the community.

The Rise and Fall of Empires

Encounters between conquistadors and Aztecs in an academic style often followed the reverse line of the racial dichotomy depicted by Rivera. For example in the nineteenth-century painting by Emanuel Leutze (1816-1868) shows buildings and Indians with similar stylistic forms and indigenous themes to the zone 1 combat scene, yet follows an opposing colonialist tradition. Academic painters in the United States of America drew on the accounts of traveler-reporter artists to give form to their ideas. Leutze's *Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and his Troops* (fig. 3.11) is based on William H. Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, 'a richly detailed account, published in 1843, of how the explorer Hernán Cortés vanquished the Aztec empire' (Truettner 1991: 59). This German-American artist employed lithographs of the Mayan temple sites of the Yucatán, drawn by Catherwood during his travels with Stevens and published in 1844. Prescott wrote that: 'We cannot regret the fall of an empire which did so little to promote the happiness of its subjects, or the real interests of humanity' (Prescott quoted in Truettner 1991: 61). He goes on to describe the lack of empathy 'we' should feel for these 'inhumane' people: 'The Aztecs were emphatically a fierce and brutal race, little calculated, in their best aspects, to excite our sympathy and regard' (Prescott quoted in Truettner 1991:

61). Leutze can be assumed to be celebrating the Spaniards' victory, as he was drawing on Prescott's account, and Truettner suggests that the 'angle of advance assures them ultimate triumph' (1991: 59). Leutze's painting also contains some similar elements to Rivera's depiction of the conquest battle in zone 1. Both illustrations take the moment of the conquest as the seminal historical moment and the overall effect of each combat scene presents the idea that this moment of conquest is the determining point at which Mexican history began. Although Rivera illustrates an idyllic pre-Columbian past in the Right Panel *Prehispanic Mexico* (fig. 4.1), the architectonic structure of the stairwell causes the scene of the battle between Cortés and the Tlaxcalans to be dramatically experienced first. To take the point of initial contact of the viewer from the moment of the Conquest can be regarded as skewing the initial reading of *History of the Mexican People*. The viewer experiences this moment as the narrative point of departure, hence the Conquest by the Spanish as the point of historical origin, rather than the celebration of Mesoamerican culture. The emphasis on the Conquest as the starting point can be regarded as viewing Mexican history from a colonialist paradigm. The idyllic presentation of the Mesoamerican past is not experienced until later up the path of the stair case, as discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. This order of experience has the effect of locating the Mesoamerican past in relation to the Conquest as a marginalised space, experienced after the drama and intensity of zone 1. This similarity in the point of historical origin between the representations by Leutze and Rivera underlines the interaction between Western hegemonic images and Mexican *Indigenismo*.

Zone 2: Eagle and Teocalli

Six upright figures stand in (fig. 3.12) the space above the intersecting diagonals which are formed by the criss-crossing of battle spears. This area marks the interface between zones 1 and 2. The man with long, black hair wears a white robe, a horned helmet and has his back to the viewer. He holds his arm up and is grasping something that appears to be a human heart as blood streams down his arm. The heart is an offering to the large eagle. Just to the right of this man stands a vertical figure clasping a sword in his right hand, wearing a proud facial expression and a plumed helmet with two side decorations. Facing him to the left of the man in white is a man wearing an eagle costume, hurling a slingshot and standing in front of a flag upon which is an inverted eagle symbol. Further to the left on this same plane, three men stand together; one beats a drum, another blows into a conch shell whilst the third holds another instrument in his mouth.

The large eagle is portrayed carrying two long serpentine objects in its beak, one of which is orange, the other blue. The shape of these intertwined objects is reminiscent of the snake in the Mexican flag. This giant bird perches in the fulcrum of the central space and comes into view after the battle scene during the visual experience of ascending the main stairway. The eagle stands on a cactus and his claws clasp the plant out of which grows two flowers. The trapezium shaped stone on which the cactus rests contains decorations echoing

the shapes and colours in the eagle's beak. In the centre of this pedestal is a large circle containing a symmetrical pattern, which resembles the famed Mexican sun stone.²⁹ Two flags flank the giant bird; on the left a black and white geometrical design with green decoration and on the right an orange-backed flag again repeating elements of design and colour of the objects in the eagle's beak. The orange of these echoed shapes is in the shape of a flame and the blue in a vessel looks like water.

La Guerra Sagrada

The emotional response to zone 2 contrasts starkly with the agitation stimulated by zone 1; the large eagle is resting and observing, poised for flight in suspended animation. The calm composure of the bird encourages the eye to take respite from the visual chaos beneath and rest on this central 'illuminated' point. As cultural 'texts' are polysemic, reading the mural is a mercurial task with numerous potential perspectives. Many 'readings' may occur simultaneously with the result of augmenting the power of representation as it has the potential to capture wider audiences. The eagle in itself has diverse meanings, one of which is its significance as the major symbol of the founding of the Aztec City, Tenochtitlán (the place of the cactus fruit). As predicted through legend, an eagle would be perched on a cactus

²⁹ The sunstone was 'discovered' on the 17 December 1790 in the Plaza Principal in Mexico which the National Palace flanks. Earlier in the same year on the 13 August 1790 a gigantic statue of Aztec Mother Goddess *Coatlicue* was found. The discovery of these objects had an enormous impact on the racial politics of Mexico 'because it focused the beginning of a renewal of interest in indigenous society onto the cultural creativity expressed in Aztec art' (Broda, Carrasco, Matos Moctezuma 1987: 18). The use of Prehispanic artefacts in post-revolutionary discourse will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

devouring a serpent marking the spot where the first Aztecs/Mexica would build their settlement. The central eagle holds the Aztec banner for sacred warfare which is composed of the combined symbols for fire (red/orange) and water (blue).³⁰ As the eagle perching on a cactus with a serpent in his beak is depicted in the centre of the Mexican flag, the similarity between this image and the serpentine Aztec symbol therefore links the ‘mythology’ of the past founding of Tenochtitlán in 1325, now Mexico City with the forging of the modern nation.

This Aztec symbol of the foundation myth is to be found at the back of the Temple of Sacred Warfare *Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada* (fig. 3.13), a stone monument which celebrated the New Fire ceremony of 1507. The Aztec glyph on the flags and in the eagle’s mouth (fig 3.14) represents Water-Fire (steam), whose cosmological significance will be discussed in Chapter Four in relation to Quetzalcóatl, the eagle-serpent, and Rivera’s depiction of Mesoamerican spirituality. The pyramid-shaped base, on which the eagle in zone 3 stands, is also a recognised Masonic symbol.

Glowing Gold: Transcending Reality

The gold colour of the majestic eagle in zone 2 has an iridescent quality which combined with its placement at the centre of the space causes it to dominate the whole composition. There is a sense of security evoked by the presence of the eagle; this is the ubiquitous symbol of Mexican unity which has a place in the historical memory. This symbol in the context of the Conquest to the Present depicted in

³⁰ It is likely that the fire-water figure was copied from the Aztec Stone carving of the ‘Teocalli (temple) of Sacred Warfare Stone’, which is to be found in the Museo de Antropología, *Mexico City* (Folgarait 1998: 96).

the Central Panel adds to the impression which is projected by the mural of the revolutionary state as being part of universal rather than historically specific time. A sense of universality is achieved with the deployment of a number of visual and discursive elements. Firstly, we must view the eagle's central position in zone 2 in the context of the whole triptych mural *History of the Mexican People* (fig. 1.0). The full panoramic view of the mural elicits a harmonious balancing of disparate elements. The golden bird is linked to the symbols of the sun (in the South and North Panels) through its gleaming, yellow colour, which foregrounds the composition and the quality of illumination is therefore intensified by repetition highlighting various symbols in the mural. The Aztec worship of the sun is also placed in inter-textual association here as the eagle perches on a plinth which displays a circular design resembling the sunstone and Quetzalcoatl who is rising towards the sun as in Aztec legend. This linking of the eagle and the solar symbol strengthens the sense of universal time and of the eternal as it is represented in the three vastly divergent time frames of the triptych as ever present and largely unchanging. The large size of these three symbols (the two suns in the left and right panels respectively and the central eagle) compared to other figures in the mural also reinforces the symbolic potency of each dominating sign. The figure of the eagle devouring its prey whilst perched on a cactus was documented by Spanish Codices such as the *Codex Mendoza*, a document prepared by the Indians in 1591 at Spanish command. The triangular composition which is reflected along a central horizontal line on which the eagle rests is noteworthy in terms of the mural composition.

The symbolism of the eagle is internationally significant and has powerful connotations. The potent representation of the eagle has been chosen by several nations as an emblem for vastly divergent causes.³¹ The eagle's qualities connote a power that has the ability to soar above everyday reality and rise over the chaotic contradictions of society through a higher perspective and broader vision. Three different eagles are represented in different areas of the Central Panel (see figs. 3.1, 3.12, 3.39 and 3.30).

Eagle and Mural as a National Flag

The sense of universal time is strengthened by the linkage between three different historical timeframes containing representations of the eagle. There is an imaginary triangular movement depicted as one eagle is flying into the picture on the right in zone 5d, then the large eagle resting on the plinth and finally the eagle flying out of the composition in zone 5e wearing the Hapsburg crown. This line which can be traced between these suggested movements gives a sense of reflected balance and linkage which exists elsewhere in the composition and resembles the reflected upper triangle of the excerpt from the *Codex Mendoza* (fig. 3.15). The eagle is the central focal point of the panel around which various shapes and colours are reflected. The triangular shape of the composition has particular significance in relation to Rivera's artistic training and his understanding of the 'Golden Section' which taught that the harmonic proportions of aesthetic compositions had a universal spiritual effect relating to all

³¹ Some examples of the eagle depicted on flags are Albania, Moldova and Nazi Germany (US states: Illinois, Iowa, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Utah).

matter. The use of the number three is a major cornerstone of the practise of 'the division in the Golden Section' and is an awareness of 'its dynamic, harmonious and infinite triangulation' (Campos 1986: 119).³²

Folgarait sees the threefold structure of the triptych, with the eagle at this central point, as complementing and reinforcing the function of the mural as a flag in itself. He argues that the National Palace Mural functions as a nationalist flag, symbolically unifying the discordant elements of the post-revolutionary Mexican nation and reinforcing an illusory cohesion (Folgarait 1998:115). Folgarait utilises the notion of political power being co-opted through a 'dialectic of control' that subsumed all attempts of subordinates to counter governmental domination (Folgarait 1998: 134). He focuses on class relations and states that '[p]roducers of their own political will would become the products of a more powerful will' as the mural functions as a site for 'ritual to resolve contradiction' (Folgarait 1998: 137). Therefore viewing the triptych mural is regarded as a form of ritual in which the viewer is exposed to a unifying nationalistic hegemonic message. This theory of the ritual qualities of viewing the mural as a flag must be historically situated as the eagle flag has championed several causes in Mexico.

The symbolic power of the flag with an eagle has been used at different points in the country's history. José María Morelos ³³ used a

³² Rivera applied this knowledge to anatomy stating that '[i]f we construct a Golden Section from the base of the retinal field to the area where the optic nerves spread to the brain, it will be precisely at the centre of the crossing of the optic nerve. This same law then controls, our visual sphere from the eye outward and from the eye inward' (Rivera *quoted in* Campos 1986: 119).

³³ Morelos fought for independence from Spain and tried to create a constitution for an independent Mexico in 1814. Morelos was pursued and

flag with an eagle on a nopal cactus and the message “VVM” (*Viva la Virgen María*) and Agustín de Iturbide³⁴ adopted the Aztec eagle with an added crown (Lomnitz 2001: 47). The ‘universality’ of the eagle has therefore been employed in different culturally and historically specific circumstances in Mexico. Rivera utilises the cultural flexibility of this aquiline symbol to make certain nationalistic statements. The other eagles, representing historical world powers (exemplified by the United States and the Hapsburg Empire), are invading and leaving respectively, and clearly demarcate the borders of composition adding force to an implied message of Mexican sovereignty.

National identity is a double-edged sword with both ‘productive’ and ‘regressive’ consequences, the symbolism of which is connoted within this symbolic bird. The eagle is perched proudly on a plinth which stands for the fact that Mexico as a nation has a firmly established foothold on the world stage. This unifying image resonates with the historical fact that it was necessary for the state to appear to be an international force to contend with, under Calles in order to be treated as sovereign. The other two less conspicuous eagles both symbolise the alien ‘danger’ which must be expelled from the borders of the historic nation and are reminiscent of the ‘bad old days’ when

killed by the Spanish in 1815. Suffering the same fate as Father Miguel Hidalgo, he underwent an ecclesiastical trial for heresy and was also tried for treason. He was executed in 1815 and his head joined Hidalgo’s at Guanajuato to act as a warning for potential traitors.

³⁴ Iturbide announced the *Plan de Iguala* on February 24, 1821 and his emergence as a political leader marked the beginning of the era of the *caudillo* (charismatic military leader) in Mexico. The *Plan de Iguala* consisted of three strands: 1) Mexico would declare independence from Spain; 2) equal treatment would be given to Creoles and Peninsulares; 3) The Catholic Church would remain the central religion (with the consequence of religious intolerance of other religions). Iturbide’s empire- an attempt to establish a monarchy after independence- lasted less than a year.

Díaz encouraged foreign investment. The symbolic importance of these eagles will be discussed in more detail later in the analysis of zone 5. The later corruption of Calles in terms of allegiance to 'foreign' powers is discussed in Chapter Five of the thesis.

Blood and Water-Fire and the Fatherland

The central figure of the eagle must be considered in context with the surrounding figures. A flurry of warm colours counterpoised with the brightness of white illuminates zone 2. The brown skins of six human figures, the yellow of animal costumes and the orange-red of the sun stone and shield; all add to the sense of warmth and light which draw the eye to this central point in the composition. Characters from Aztec history are contained within this area, illustrating the foundations upon which all the figures in zones 4 to 5e stand. The objects in the central eagle's beak, representing the Aztec emblem of ceremonial war, strike the observer as if together they were the snake in the beak of the eagle of the Mexican flag. This cultural presumption prompts the eye to look again and see the symbolism revealed with closer scrutiny. These Aztec symbols resembling the elements of fire and water in colour and shape, are echoed on the orange and blue flag, the warrior's shield and the plinth. The symbols of the Mexican nation are inextricably linked with the foundations upon which the Aztec past is built and the pedestal which they surround provides a foothold for the peasants who stand in zone 3. Therefore, the aesthetic experience links the foundations of the nation on which the people stand on a signification chain with the struggle of the Aztecs and the physical reality of the National Palace building

which is firmly situated in real time and space. The depiction of the eagle on a cactus is ubiquitously replicated across Mexico in its flag thus linking the mural to many other nationalistic sites.

Zone 2 is replete with emotive symbolism which intensifies the drama of this central area. The presence of the bleeding heart held up by an Indian warrior to the central eagle resonates with universal representations of courage, sacrifice and suffering and is also a prominent image in Catholic iconography. The emotive qualities of the depiction of the heart are strengthened by the symbolic potency of blood which creates an association simultaneously with life and death. The allusion to the ritual practice of Aztec human sacrifice is employed to create further dramatic intensity. These images of the 'Indian' were an integral component of Mexican identity in the late nineteenth century. During the Porfiriato as Knight points out, the elite were 'involved in the task of state building' and in this political climate 'the Indian figured as an antinational element requiring prompt and, if necessary, forcible assimilation' (Knight 1990: 79). In 1874, Jorge Hamecken y Mexia, wrote an article dedicated to his teacher, the writer Ignacio Manuel Altamirano:

[...] Our contemporary art, the art of the nineteenth century, should be realistic in its form [...] and basically progressive. Art for art's sake... is false, absurd illogical art... which must surrender its altars to the divine ideal of democratic art [...] it is high time to challenge this corrupt and philistine society, to shame it and to defeat it with pictures

of the home, the family, the freedom of the fatherland.

(quoted in Rodríguez 1969: 138)

Cuauhtémoc and Country

Images of the indigenous were integral to these Porfirian images of the fatherland. Using the monument to Cuauhtémoc inaugurated in 1887 (fig 3.16) as one of her main examples, Fabiola Martínez illustrates how state funded projects during the Porfiriato ‘constructed images of the nation using prehispanic iconography whilst seeking to convey notions of modernity’ (2004)³⁵. Knight also notices the purpose such monuments to the ‘Indian’ served in creating an image of integration and validation to obscure the fact that in real terms there was more continuity than change with regard to policy affecting the indigenous people of Mexico: ‘however, Porfirian indigenismo was more rhetorical than real: its material manifestations were statues of Cuauhtémoc in Mexico City rather than Indian schools in the countryside’ (1990: 79). Rivera’s depiction of the Aztec heroes Cuauhtémoc and Montezuma in zone 1 displays no visible development from this prior Porfirian representation of the ‘noble’ Indian past.³⁶

The *Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores de México* declared: ‘[p]roclamamos que siendo nuestro momento social de transición entre el aniquilamiento de un orden envejecido y la implantación de un orden nuevo’ (1989 [1923]: 323). However, the portrayals of indigenous heroes in zones 1 and 2 are

³⁵ Unpublished conference paper, no page numbers.

³⁶ Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo notes that the designs for the 1889 Paris fair which put Mexico on exoticised display for the international European elite included Alberto Herrera’s design for the Cuauhtémoc monument on the *Paseo de la Reforma* (Tenorio-Trillo 1996: 55).

more images of continuity rather than change. The link with the representation of the indigenous leader Cuauhtémoc, constructed at the time of the Díaz dictatorship, is indicative of the old historical roots of the assumed 'new order'. Craven has suggested that Rivera 'has not idealised the pre-Hispanic people in this mural, thus confirming his *alternative*³⁷ "indigenismo"' (Craven 1997: 115). This thesis argues against Craven, and holds that the links between portrayals of the glorified Aztec leader, the statue of Cuauhtémoc and policies glorifying the Aztec past during the Díaz dictatorship are significant in understanding post-revolutionary nationalism in Mexico. The similarities suggest that elements of Rivera's monumental, aesthetic interpretation of *indigenismo* are in fact specifically historically rooted and not solely the result of the revolution of 1910 or an altogether 'alternative' perspective on the indigenous question. This linkage of Rivera's supposed 'alternative' *indigenismo* to historical antecedents of racial representation (particularly of Aztec heroes) counteracts the socio-mythology of a 'new order' which resounded in revolutionary rhetoric.

Golden Eagle: Golden Age

The mythology of Rivera's allegedly 'new' perspective has historical resonances with Smith's theory of universal nationalist socio-mythologies. Another cornerstone of 'Myths of Ethnic Descent' is 'A Myth of Regeneration, or *How to Restore the Golden Age and Renew Our Community as 'in the Days of Old'*' (Smith 1999: 67). This aspect of nationalist rationalisation moves from the realm 'of explanatory

³⁷ Emphasis mine.

myth' to 'prescriptive ideology' or more specifically 'from an idealised epic history' to a 'rationale of collective mobilisation' (Smith 1999: 67). The 'central concept of nationalism', according to the theory of universal 'Myths of Ethnic Descent', is 'that of regeneration together with associated notions of authenticity and autonomy' (Smith 1999: 67). The encoded universality of the eagle combined with its dominant size provides a multidimensional symbol of authenticity: it is as if it were at once ageless, timeless and ubiquitous. The inclusion of the serpentine object in the beak connotes a specific 'Mexican' flag and asserts the sovereignty which was the touchstone of the Nationalist revolution. The image is, therefore, simultaneously nationalistic and universal. The compelling contradictory logic is therefore that the one is somehow the other and the natural order of things is restored after foreign invasion. This appeal to a 'golden age' is evident in the condensed history of zone 2 (reinforced in context by the whole panel) and links with the description of ethnic socio-mythology as '[p]sychologically compelling if logically incoherent' (Smith 1999: 68). The mural's inspirational symbolism merges with real historical events and resonates with the facet of ethnosymbolic myth in which 'quasi-Messianic promises' are presented along side other 'quite realistic and concrete goals' (Smith, 1999: 68). The ideal state represented by the fusion of fact and fiction cannot be realised due to real political constraints. The fantastical fusing of the resplendent images of the golden eagle, the sun and the heroic Aztec leader Cuauhtémoc are juxtaposed with real historical figures in the 'golden age' and illuminated by a golden sun in other panels of the mural (figs. 4.1 and 5.1). This factually fictitious hybrid creates a socio-cultural mythology

through a representational merging of truth with mythology. This socio-cultural formation also applies to other areas of the mural and will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

Smith's theory of ethno-symbolism and the discrete components of nationalist mythology may be applied to analyse Rivera's use of symbolism and historical characters in zone 2. The centrality of the golden eagle's symbolism in this context links it to the indigenous past and Aztec belief³⁸ and illuminates the mural with a transcendent aura and links historical moments to the inevitability of a golden age. The presence of the bright, yellow, ever-present sun in the right and left panels of the mural links past and present to the transcendent glory of the eagle existing in universal time. Time is not only transcended but stands still as the sun in resplendent glory is perpetually present, setting on the South/Left Wall and rising on the North/Right Wall. The symbolic impression linking the fore-grounded, yellow illuminated symbols of the eagle and the suns in all three panels is that time paradoxically is at once universal, cyclical and new whilst linked to past, present and future.

Zone 3: Cruel Church/Benevolent Church

Ecclesiastical figures stand on either side of the two flags, just behind the outer edges of the pedestal (figs. 3.17 and 3.18). On the left, the figure wears a cross, black and red robes and points to a book whilst holding a scroll in his hand; also on the left, figures in robes

³⁸ The emblem for sacred warfare in the eagle's beak is depicted in the Mexican National Museum of Anthropology and carved as a temple symbol. This link between warfare and religion is testimony to the fact that Aztec society 'was profoundly religious as well as militaristic' (Bernal 1999: 78).

brandishing crosses surround two figures dressed in white wearing conical hats and bound to boards by their hands and feet (fig. 3.17). Looking closely, we see a fire burning the feet of one of these white-robed figures. Above this scene a procession is passing by under a red canopy. The participants, whose shoulders we can see, are dressed in black with white neck ruffles. One partially obscured figure wears white robes and a mitre. All the figures in the procession have their faces pointing in another direction, seemingly oblivious to the cruelty depicted below. Further left still yet on the same plane as the scene of torture, an 'Indian' woman is dressed in white and clutches a child, hiding his face in a protective gesture. A finely dressed, bearded figure stands beside her, holding his hand in his waistcoat and surveying a group of partially clothed Indians building with large blocks of white stone.

Two dark-skinned figures hoist stone blocks using a simple rope and wood pulley system; another carries a large bundle on his back and is moving towards a fire around which stand two tonsured figures, and a raggedly dressed, dark, bent figure is poised ready to throw a large, flat object onto the flames. In the left, lower corner of the central panel, are three figures dressed in tunics one holding a cauldron of orange liquid, a second a metal bar and a third thrusting a longer bar into the face of a kneeling figure with manacled feet.

Moving to the opposite side of the pedestal and again describing the content out from the centre to the periphery of this plane (fig. 3.18). On the right of the plinth tonsured Franciscan monks stand in a circle. Their white and brown robes contrast with the dark Dominican robes of the cruel figures on the opposite side of the mural. The Franciscans

are at a font and one of them pours water over the head of a partially dressed, dark-skinned person. Next to this font other robed figures are embraced by kneeling, bare-backed figures. One of these white and brown robed figures stands upright and faces two finely clothed, bearded figures, the farthest right of which resembles the central armoured figure of Cortés in the battle scene and the onlooker to the builders on the opposite side of the picture. The religious man wearing the white and brown, monastic, robes brandishes a cross but with different intent to those of the left side. He appears to be making a protective gesture over a dark brown figure lying at their feet in a lifeless pose. One of two figures looking down on the dead body is holding something that looks like gold jewellery; the other holds an object resembling a machete. Behind this scene on the far right of the picture, six brown-skinned men hack at a rock with picks whilst one armoured figure holds a whip ready to strike out at them. A group of five armoured men occupy the space in the far right corner. One of these sits down wounded and clutches his thigh and two others carry a bundle; another lights a fuse on a cannon using a taper and another of these fires a musket into the battle scene (fig. 3.19).

The emotional impact of zone 3 from the first landing is intimate and disorientating. The crowd is homogenised through a collapsed version of history which intermeshes the actors of the drama. Many people from diverse moments of history are juxtaposed in dynamic interaction with each other. The action again draws the viewer into involvement as the human drama of kindness and cruelty is depicted exacting an intensely emotional reaction. The religious figures connect to both sides of zone 3 (fig. 3.17 and 3.18) as brutality and

benevolence are displayed respectively with the actions of two groups of people who show contrasting and analogous features simultaneously. The viewer, as moving participant, may imaginatively identify with any one of the heroes and villains of the compressed narrative. The density of figures allows no one to dominate; it as if they have all equally contributed to the seemingly inevitable fate of Mexican history. This balanced design of both sides of zone 3 is part of larger underlying compositional factors to be found in *History of the Mexican People* (fig. 1.0). The two sides of the entire mural also have a reflective quality due to the depiction of the two large suns and the structure of the temple on the Right Panel and 'cage' on the Left Panel. This reinforces the visual dichotomy of the composition and the dialectical interplay such as the complexities of religion in which opposites contain component parts of the other side, for example: good/evil. The link is achieved through the visual balancing of form and mirroring of vibrant colour. The integral warmth of the colours increases the sense of emotional participation through a signifying link with human warmth. The identification process involved in the mobile participation with the mural stimulates the sense of empathy and involvement in the observer. The figures are vivified by the progress of the pedestrian up the stairs and across the first landing. The medley of warm colours contained in the depiction of fire and firearms raises the intensity of the emotional upsurge. The densely packed figures, vivid colour and crowded scenes of concentrated action draw the viewer actively and more deeply into the experience of Mexican history.

There are many figures with whom the viewer can identify in the mural space. This process of imaginative empathy involves a wide

spectrum of varied sensory experiences which exaggerate the emotional power of the image. The intense emotions of pain and the terror of torture in zone 3 are represented by burning and branding as the conquistadors persecute and take captives (fig. 3.17). The context of these depictions in zone 3 juxtaposed with the barbarity depicted in zone 1 (fig. 3.8), intensifies the emotional impact of this section: the drama of the combat scenes below, the implied sounds of battle cries, swords clashing, gunshots, cannon fire and assailants falling. The ability to hide from reality is illustrated by the blind eye of denial as the figures pass by under the canopy and the boy's face is hidden by his mother's protective embrace. Extremes of temperature are depicted by the burning crackle of codices in fire which contrasts with the coolness of water at the baptismal font. Many opposites coexist and are fleetingly experienced in the imagination of the onlooker: the pious and the innocent, the cruel and benevolent, the brave and the cowardly, the heroic and the tyrannical along with the powerful and disenfranchised. A powerful dramatic impact is inspired through the depiction of severe conditions, combined with stark contrasts of colour and content.

Anti-Clerical Legacy

In his memoirs, Rivera presents himself as having inherited a strongly anti-clerical legacy from his liberal father.³⁹ The artist insists that through a gesture of paternal protection his fundamental nature had been unaffected by the trappings of Catholic religious dogma and that: '[a]round my soul, however, he drew a line; that was off limits to

³⁹ Rivera's father, also named Diego Rivera, was a teacher as was the artist's mother Maria Pilar Barrientos.

the pious ones' (Rivera 1991: 5). In the light of this declaration, the educated will see another dimension underlying the historical content of the mural. These central zones 3 (fig 3.17 and 3.18), along with zone 1, illustrate aspects of the Spanish Conquest. Contrary to 'the standard view' of Rivera which he himself puts forward, this section shows 'no one-dimensional vilification of the Church' (Craven 1997: 113). Both the brutality and compassion of the Catholic Church are clearly portrayed in zone 3; a struggle of a different sort is presented through a division between 'good and evil' characters and practices. As mentioned earlier, the hot fire of torture is counterpoised with the cold refreshment of baptism by water. Rivera portrays the 'compassion' of the Church through characters such as the sixteenth-century Dominican friar Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, dressed in black with a quill, who in his ethnographic magnum opus *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* or *Códice Florentino*, chronicled the daily socio-economic life of the pre-Columbian world and aspects of language, culture and religion. Standing close to Sahagún are Vasco de Quiroga, 'humanitarian first bishop of Guadalajara' and Pedro de Gante, 'Franciscan educator of "Indians" in the Valley of Mexico' (Catlin 1986: 264). Bare-backed indigenous men, in a gesture resembling that of frightened children, clutch at clerical figures one of whom is the famed friar Bartolomé de las Casas, who travelled with Columbus and here is shown holding up a cross defending 'Indians' from Cortés.

How We Fell: The 'Black Legend' of Spanish Oppression

To the left of the eagle we see the depiction of the ‘black legend’ of Spanish oppression in the form of the burning of pre-Hispanic cultural objects in the large fire and the cruelties of the *auto-da-fé*; public display of punishment by the religious authorities of the Spanish Inquisition. The ‘black legend’ is further portrayed by the cruelty of the branding of slaves by the conquistadors (fig. 3.20). The observer is thus embroiled in the intense emotional drama of historical representation. A similar theme and composition to Rivera’s scene of Spanish cruelty, can be seen in the painting *The Torture of Cuauhtémoc* (1892) (fig 3.21) by Leonardo Izaguirre (1867-1941). As Baddeley and Fraser (1989) point out, in the nineteenth century, during the period directly following independence, Europe continued to be the cultural leader for all the new Latin American nations. The academies of art were habitually run by Europeans who were anxious to hold on to the tenets of their training, therefore political independence was often ‘accompanied by a more rigid cultural dependency than that which had obtained during the colonial period’ (Baddeley and Fraser 1989: 42). Indians were the subject of academic painting, principally in Mexico. The nationalistic, heroic images of Indians emerged as a result of discourses of independence and reform. The academic painter and critic Felipe S. Gutiérrez (1824-1904) was one of the first in the Mexican Academy to rebel against art for art’s sake ‘y en diferentes artículos periodísticos expresó su descontento’:

[...] si la prensa no da a conocer la importancia de las Bellas Artes; si ella no crea el gusto con su crítica y no la difunde, supuesto que es el vehículo que transmite las ideas y los

conocimientos, mal podrá adquirirse en México [...] y no se ocupa de la ejecución de obras clásicas, ornando los edificios públicos y particulares con los grandes episodios de nuestra historia y las poéticas costumbres de nuestro país. (Gutiérrez quoted in Tíbol 1964: 59-60)

Gutiérrez was suggesting a purposeful art with patriotic themes. Mexican academic painters Izaguirre and Félix Parra (1845-1919) depicted indigenous themes in classical styles during the late nineteenth century. They were portrayed with model European faces frequently as valiant martyrs or bearing the brutality of Spaniards.

In Izaguirre's painting, the last Aztec ruler, Cuauhtémoc, suffers torture by fire under the Spanish Inquisition for having defied and resisted the conquerors. The torture and cruelty of this scene (figs. 3.20 and 3.21) and the rape of an Indian woman in zone 1 (fig 3.8), depict the Spanish conquistadors as bestial and inhumane. The illustration of conquistadors branding an Indian is part of a general theme of Spanish cruelty throughout the mural, for instance, in zone 1. The sharp, haughty features of Cortés characterise him as a cold-blooded killer who feels superior to his war victim (fig. 3.10). Izaguirre's nineteenth-century example shows the continuity between Mexican academic painting during the *Porfiriato* and Rivera's post-revolutionary depiction of Spanish cruelty and the Aztec indigenous leader. The cruelty of the Spaniards was presented alongside a paternal beneficence which encouraged assimilation to Christian 'civilised ways'. Rivera depicts the cruelty and benevolence of the Conquest in the left and right panels of the mural respectively.

In the context of the movement up the stairs there is a sense that within this disorder of the fires of cruelty and torture are also the possibilities of reaching cooler more rational expressions of religious devotion represented by the kindly and educated figures of de las Casas and Sahagún. There is an implicit sense therefore that history contains the ingredients to move out from disorder into order through a 'natural', elemental process which eventually leads to a 'rational' alternative such as the Marxist vision depicted on the left wall (fig. 5.1). This is consistent with Marx's belief that the dialectic was a natural product of historical teleology. History and culture become biology and natural processes through representational reduction. This compressed version of history contains many absences which result in socio-cultural mythologies. For example the 'black legend' of the conquistadors obfuscates the complexity of the history of slavery and war amongst the indigenous peoples. A one-sided representation of cruelty obscures such historical facts as the Aztec practices of sacrifice and slavery, in which the 'vital force' of an enemy was believed to be liberated and expended in a process which reinforced alliances with the 'appropriating nation' (Lomnitz 2001: 38).

The forging of a homogenising image of a people from a diverse population will necessarily involve misrepresentation through omission. In the visual historical essay which the mural is, what is not said is often as important as what is said. Homi K Bhabha's assertion that 'the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things' (Bhabha 1990: 11), may be applied to the specific historical context of the forging of a revolutionary image in Mexico. Rivera's Manichean

representation of the kindness and cruelty of the Church contains a reductive representation of the religious dimension of the conquest of the Mexica. Sahagún documented the beliefs of the indigenous peoples in order to inform Christian priests of the composition of 'pagan' religious practices. He aimed to encourage a generation of Indians to lead a truly Christian life by rejecting both their ancestral teachings and the corruption of the conquistadors (Carrasco 1982: 45). By contrast to other approaches to the indigenes, Sahagún however did protect the Indians from the atrocities of conquistadors.

Conflicts of Continuity and Change

The image of de las Casas in Rivera's work (fig. 3.22) derives from the repertoire of paternalist imagery in the San Carlos Academy in the late nineteenth century. Academic painters espoused the theme of the re-invented 'noble savage' which was a progressive step when compared with the flagrant racism which classified all 'Indian' features as ugly and debased:

The Indian, who had been despised as 'ugly', belonging to an 'inferior race' and given to 'uncivilised practices', whom the conquistadors considered as having no soul', began to be rehabilitated and produced a number of native painters such as José Obregón, Rodrigo Gutiérrez, Leandro Izaguirre, José Jara and Félix Parra. (Rodríguez 1969: 137)

These nineteenth-century representations of the 'noble race' are echoed in the *Manifesto of the Union of Mexican Workers, Technicians,*

Painters and Sculptors which states that 'our people (especially our Indians) [are] the source of all that is noble toil, all that is virtue' (1989 [1923]):324). Rivera describes the impact of the late nineteenth century academic paintings with Indian themes:

Among the teachers at the San Carlos, three stand out in my memory. The first was Felix Parra, a conventional painter himself but possessed with a passionate love for our pre-Conquest Indian art. He communicated this enthusiasm to me with such success that it has lived on in me, through many changes of taste and fortune to this day. (Rivera 1991: 17)

This idealisation of indigenous peoples, as exemplified by the depictions by these nineteenth century painters, contained many internal contradictions. For instance the 'beautifying' of the 'Indian' was based on a classical European accepted model. This seeming elevation was often the inversion of denigration and took various forms. As Stacie G. Widdifield points out: 'the all-too-real subjects in Parra's painting were the object of the paternalism typical of nineteenth century writing about the contemporary Indian' (1990: 129). In the nineteenth-century depiction *Fray Bartolomé de las Casas* (fig. 3. 23), the monk is 'responding to the carnage of a vicious attack by the Spanish soldiers, [...] Parra's realism and his attention to detail give the painting a ring of truth' (Widdifield 1990: 129). The Indians are unarmed and defenceless and persecuted by the conquistadors. As the Spaniards are clothed they appear more civilised. The Indians in these

paintings are only partially clothed or near-naked, indicating their vulnerability and distancing them from civilisation. The architecture depicted is also highly significant in terms of indigenous representation as it is a symbol of the indigenous past as an integral component of Mexican identity. Their salvation lies in conversion and hence assimilation to Western culture.

Such Hispanophobia as displayed in nineteenth-century art by Parra and Izaguirre and the attendant paternalism towards the indigenous population were cornerstones of post-independence Mexican liberal political thought. The anti Spanish interpretation condemned the Church as part of colonialism, '[t]hereafter anticlericism would be the touchstone of liberal ideology and historiography' (Benjamin 2000: 17). Benjamin notes that this image was underlined by the writings 'and orations of Ignacio Ramírez and Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, which adopted the *indigenismo* of Creole patriotism (and the black Legend of Bartolomé de las Casas for good measure)' (Benjamin 2000: 17). He explains that 'they glorified the Insurgency and its sequel, the Reform', creating a 'master narrative that found its expression and glorification in official histories, school textbooks, commemorative monuments, and patriotic orations' (Benjamin 2000: 17). Clear resonances with the Hispanophobia and 'black legend' are to be found in Charlot's description of Parra's work:

Félix Parra, later praised by Rivera as "upholder of the cult of ancient American art," presented Cortez as a ruffian, his spurred boot on the carcass of a dead Indian. (Charlot 1963:

8)

Malinche and Cortés

Integral to the Liberal Independence image of the Mexican people was the portrayal of the *mestizo*. The notion of the *mestizo* as the root of the modern Mexican nation is also a key theme in Rivera's work which again brings out the continuity rather than rupture in his 'revolutionary' art. Rivera depicts the creation of the first *mestizo* child twice in the National Palace Mural. The first image is in zone 3, where Rivera depicts Malinche and Cortés (fig. 3.24). The second image is in the patio corridor and will be discussed later in this chapter. The overlapping discourses of race, class and gender are significant in this depiction of the Indian Malinche, daughter of an Aztec cacique, as the 'first mother' of the *mestizo* and the European as the 'first father'. There are many absences in the collapsed version of the history of the exoticised Mexican nation in the mural triptych and one of the most striking omissions is the negligible portrayal of women, with the exception of Malintzan Tenepal: the only woman whose face we can see in zone 3.⁴⁰ This mythologised depiction of the translator, strategic advisor and mistress to the Cortés is the symbol of betrayal of the Mexican 'race'.⁴¹ This one distinct representation embodies many patriarchal formulations and hegemonic images. The prisoner of her exoticised beauty she is restricted to a role amounting to denial of any

⁴⁰ Apart from the profile of a woman in zone 5a.

⁴¹ Malinche is also commonly known as *La Vendida* or the 'sell-out' to the white race (Moraga 1983: 99). Contemporary Chicana feminists have re-appropriated the symbol of Malinche and envisioned her history as an intelligent translator and the proud mother of the Mexican race (Anzaldúa 1987, Moraga 1983).

representation of a real woman. Malinche is a potent cultural symbol. She is portrayed as outside humanity by being both above and below civilisation through representational elevation into an idealised asexual mother (fig. 3.24) or denigration outside a 'respectable' role as prostitute as on the right wall of the National Palace mural (fig. 3.25).

The most important aspect of this portrayal of 'Indian' woman is that she is an object whose importance is defined by her services to the male and her role as scapegoat for the defeat of a nation. Malintzan is a socio-cultural symbol fulfilling different social functions by being paradoxically at once heroine and traitor to her race. Malinche's role is strictly defined in relation to Cortés, whose legendary conquests dominate her contribution to history. Her character is circumscribed through her sexual relationship with him or her function as bearer of their child, who is reputed to be the first *mestizo*. The assignment of the *mestizo* as a central figure began with Independence but the 'adoption of the *mestizo* as the national race' began with the revolution (Lomnitz 2001: 52). The principal ideologists of Mexican nationalism (Luis Cabrera, Andrés Molina Enríquez, Manuel Gamio) imagined the *mestizo* as the product of a Spanish father and indigenous mother' (Lomnitz 2001: 53). Although Rivera portrays the myth of Quetzalcoatl as linked with the origins of the Mexican 'race', the portrayal of Cortés and Malinche in zone 3 presents internal contradictions to this overt message. The first *mestizo* child is therefore in keeping with this nationalist mythology, which has significance in terms of hegemonic racial representations. The *mestizo* child as socio-cultural, racial symbol marks the Spanish conquest the paternal origin of the national race whilst simultaneously reinforcing

the feminization of the 'Indian' (Lomnitz 2001: 53). The corollary of this feminisation of the 'Indian' is an implicit power relationship in which the paternal male conqueror is superior and the 'female' conquered is weaker and therefore inferior. The paternalist, protectionist state therefore aligns itself to the project of European modernisation as the feminised 'Indian' is 'civilised' by the mixing of blood with the sons of the Enlightenment. Rivera represents the 'Indian' woman Malinche as infantilised. She is posed behind the grandiose presence of Cortés which reinforces this paternalist ideology.

The First *Mestizo* and the Myth of Ancestry

Through the ostensibly subdued symbol of Malinche as the mythologised mother of the first *mestizo* child, a potent hegemonic formulation is presented. The central importance of *mestizaje* for Mexican nationalism contained implicit contradictions and it highlights the gulf between official rhetoric and reality. The idea of granting the *mestizo* a certain dignity has its origins in the post-Independence era (1810 onwards) since economic policy favoured capitalist investment and the 'making of the mestizo into a national race began to gain currency' (Lomnitz 2001: 51). Throughout the nineteenth century, the bulk of Mexico's underprivileged continued to be excluded from the supposed benefits of Mexican nationalism. The Left Wall of the mural, Mexico Today and in the Future (fig. 5.1), suggests a new direction for the *mestizo* which will be discussed in Chapter Five. All these moments are spatially placed as part of the ascent to glorious, upstanding rationality from the chaos of the battle scene which is placed spatially and psychologically below and which

represents a fallen, disordered state. The representation of the 'black legend' is fused through Malinche to the birth of the *mestizo*. Knight states that the revolutionary muralists 'provided pictorial affirmation of Indian valor, nobility, suffering, and achievement, which they set against a revived black legend of Spanish oppression' (Knight 1990: 82). As Hennessy reminds us:

A prime role for intellectuals in periods of revolutionary change is that of articulating the aspirations of the inarticulate and of providing a reputable historical ancestry so as to create a sense of continuity with the past which can ensure an element of psychic stability during periods of profound social upheaval and economic dislocation. This ancestry need not be historically accurate; the important point is that it must be expressed in compelling metaphors or cast in a mythological mold. (Hennessy 1991: 681-682)

In 'A Myth of Ancestry or *Who Begot Us and How We Developed*', the quest for a common ancestor or founding father is transposed to the communal dimension and becomes symbolic (Smith 1999: 64). The myth of *mestizo* parentage in Cortés and Malinche is both 'quasi-historical' and 'mythical' providing a sense of common ancestry and 'prestige and dignity' for the 'ethnic community' (Smith 1999: 64, 65). The 'ethnic community' then becomes the race through a symbolic 'kinship tie' providing both 'meaning and security' for the group. This idea of a collective family is also employed in short-term implementation for 'immediate mobilisation and integration' (Smith

1999: 65). Cortés and Malinche provide a quasi-historical genealogy for a collective kinship and the myth of 'Who Begot Us' and the struggle presented by religious persecution and the seeds of compassionate rationality provide a dynamic narrative of 'How We Developed'. The movement from the chaotic uncertainties of war in zone 1, to the diametrical representations within zone 3, towards the upstanding rationality in zones 4 and 5, is enhanced by Rivera's exploitation of the architectural space. The movement through the mural is employed to complement the order emerging from the disordered forms and content of the lower zones. This visual depiction of the myth of *mestizaje* in Mexican nationalist 'ancestry' can be traced to the sixteenth century in Mexico. There are strong correspondences between the depictions of *la pintura de castas* and Rivera's portrayal of Hernán Cortés and Malintzin Tenepal painted on the right patio corridor of the National Palace (1951).

In order to understand the significance of the visual representation of *mestizaje* an analysis of *la pintura de castas* is necessary. As Katzew argues in her extensive study of *la pintura de castas*, the process of *mestizaje* was based on the diverse combinations of mixing three racial groups: 'las pinturas representan el complejo proceso de *mestizaje* entre los grupos principales que habitan ese territorio español: indígenas, españoles y africanos' (Katzew 2004: 5).⁴² The child in *la*

⁴² As Victor Alba reminds us, the colonial authorities that ruled *Nueva España* for three centuries actively attempted to safeguard stringent boundaries between the Spanish and other racial populations. The three main racial groups inhabiting *Nueva España* were Spanish, 'Indian', and 'Black'. Miscegenation produced a rich variety of offspring. Caste divisions were established and power and privilege integral to cultural and biological racial credentials. There was a disparity in access to power and property between Whites and 'Indians' as well as various subcategories resulting from miscegenation (Alba 1975). Various explanations exist as to the origins of *la*

pintura de castas (fig 3. 26) attributed to José de Ibarra, is carrying a sibling in the traditional *rebozo* shawl similar to that used by Malintzan in Rivera's cameo in the right corridor of the National Palace. The costumes in *la pintura de castas* which depicts 'De español e indígena - mestizo' are enscribed with distinctive racial meanings. Likewise Cortés is dressed in the apparel of a Spaniard which is encoded with the hegemonic meaning of 'civilisation', while Malintzan Tenepal wears a traditional 'Indian' costume, and in that way the Indian is feminised. Rivera depicted himself as the first *mestizo* child of Mexico strapped to Malinche's back in a *rebozo* (fig. 3.27 and fig. 3.28), clearly aligning himself proudly with this racial category:

[...] al pie del segundo arco, representó a la mujer indígena siendo violada por un soldado conquistador. Aquí la brutalidad no es mítica, es histórica, tanto en la afrenta a la hembra como en la fusión violenta, origen del mestizaje. Dándose él mismo por aludido dentro de este relato, lo continuó en el párrafo pintado en 1951, cuando se autorretrató como hijo de la Malinche, dentro su *rebozo*. (Tibol 1997: 35)

The *mestizo*-Rivera is depicted as blue-eyed, indicating the dominance of the European resulting from miscegenation. This formulation of the paternal European dominance in *mestizaje* was put

pintura de castas all of which largely fulfil the same function '[p]ara la elite colonial, el sistema taxonómico de la pintura de castas era una manera de establecer orden en una sociedad cada vez más confusa[...] todavía era una sociedad rígidamente estructurada' (Katzew 2004: 93).

forward by nineteenth century thinkers in Mexico including Andrés Molina Enríquez whose theoretical 'mestizo was the product of a coupling of the masculine European and the feminine Indian, creating a nationalism that was simultaneously modernizing and nativist' (Dawson 2004: 6).

Mexican history has had many moments of turbulent upheaval, such as Independence, the wars of the Reform, the Revolution and the *Cristero* conflict. The post-revolutionary period was clearly one such unstable political situation which required the imposition of structures in order to reconstruct the appearance of political order and harmony. The device of *mestizaje* was used to encourage assimilation of the 'Indian' (Knight 1990). This unifying category created classifications which were imposed from outside 'Indian' culture and decided for rather than by the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Antonio Cornejo Polar holds that even in contemporary society, arguably, 'the category of *mestizaje* is the most powerful and widespread conceptual device with which Latin America has interpreted itself, although its capacity to offer self-identifying images is at this time less penetrating than it used to be a few decades ago' (2004: 116). He goes on to say that 'a salvational ideology of *mestizaje* and *mestizo* people has prevailed and still does prevail as a conciliating synthesis of the many mixtures that constitute the social and cultural Latin American corpus' (2004: 116).

The *mestizo* is a key image to be found when out to a broader vision of the mural. Although, from the first landing the view of zone 3 is fragmented and confused: there are hundreds of figures and many contrasting scenes and both colours and shapes cluster together. The viewer must look up to see the many powerful heroes of the Mexican

historical pantheon juxtaposed with a significant presence of villains. Through the sensation of looking up the viewer feels diminished in relation to these important figures. Nonetheless, the underlying movement through the mural space enhances the feeling of progressing forward. The spectator then moves round to ascend further via either of the two flights of stairs past the left or right panels. Ascending to the balcony where the view is more distanced and sweeping, there is a clear sense of moving from the intricacies of an intimate participation on the first landing towards the more detached rationality of contemplation (fig 3.29).

Balcony Views

The flight of steps moves out of view and the onlooker can pause on floor two at various points of the balcony (fig. 3.30). This lofty perspective allows a first experience of a panoramic vision of the whole of the triptych. The observer is no longer embroiled in the intimacies of participation in a pseudo-historical moment of the uncertainties and drama of war. The experience changes rapidly with the physical climb and the viewer partakes in a simultaneous sense of ascending into rationality as she or he moves up the stairs. What has been a disjointed experience of the mural until this point is here given some cohesion. What was previously a distant blur of the opposite wall on the first landing is now clearly seen in context, as the eye is given freedom to sweep across the whole sequence or select a portion of the mural to focus on. There is both a material and psychological movement into rational contemplation. The barrier of the balcony railings acts as a protective, distancing defence between the observer

and action. There is a certain cathartic pleasure at the top, in viewing from a distance after the disturbing, intimate participation with the scenes of battle and torture. From this more remote stance the spectator can enjoy the visual melodrama of the whole mural. The viewer is at once physically protected yet simultaneously psychologically entangled in a danger-free involvement, devoid of the unsettling chaos of physical participation with the more disturbing scenes. The figures are experienced as objects of contemplation rather than the subject of interaction. The condensed representation creates an ageless amalgamation of historical moments as in this panoramic view large sections of history are amassed and juxtaposed. Now the dramatic, moving intimacy with the mural space transforms into the static experience of a passive observer.

There is a decided sense of respite in being away from the experience of vulnerability amongst chaos and conflict. Now with the barrier and some detachment between the viewer and the drama, a more thoughtful gaze is encouraged. The eye is drawn to the horizontal lines and monochrome clothing of the standing figures in the spaces in and around the arches which the observer on the balcony confronts face to face. The feeling here is of being at once more distanced and contemplative but at the same time on a level with the people previously looked up to from the first landing. The spectator is now both facing the figures that stand upright in the archway and in a comparable stance to those clad in white and watching in zone 4. The viewer has clambered up through the unyielding historical foundations of the main body of the building and her/his stance and path is mirrored by the figures that appear to have struggled through the

chaos of war and torture to the solid foundation provided by the plinth. On this pedestal the eagle perches and simply dressed men and women stand in a statuesque pose on a concrete foothold in zone 4.

Zone 4: Peasants Backs

Zone 4 is the area directly above the pedestal on which the eagle stands and a crowd of people have their backs to the viewer (fig. 3.31). The group of standing figures are clothed in yellow hats, long white trousers and tunics, with different objects strapped to their backs (fig 3.32). A cluster of four peasants face an armoured man who is pointing outwards with a sword carried in his right hand. The line of the sword crosses a white piece of paper held by a grey-haired man behind him. Underneath this line are vine leaves and purple grapes. One of the most prominent and raggedly dressed figures in this scene carries a lighted torch (fig 3.32). Directly above zone 4 is the area circumscribed by the central arch and so this area bridges the focal point of the eagle and the most prominent of the arched areas. The tip of the sword almost touches the hat of the smallest of the white clothed figures counterpoised on the left. Both groups of larger people dressed in white with yellow hats are surrounded by figures with similar dark skin tones, clothing and hats; they carry children, stick shaped objects, machetes and picks.

Standing at the rails of the balcony, the viewer is placed facing the mural at the same level as these white clad figures. The feeling is as if the observer is watching with these people because the comparable stance of the viewer and mural figures, both face the elite leaders above. Passively contemplating from this position of privileged distance and relieved to hold a more controlled gaze over the vast and

overwhelming scenario there is a strong and definite sense of calm after a storm of emotion.

Purely Angelic Peasants

The white costumes of the peasants depicted in the scene combined with the haloes connoted by the shape and colour of their hats imbue them with a one-dimensional simplicity. The representation of the peasant/Indian is reminiscent of depictions of angels and other religious figures in Italian fresco. The haloed angels in the detail by Giotto's panel entitled *Lamentation* (fig. 3.33) and Rivera's indigenous peasants wear halo-like hats which are reminiscent of Giotto's figures; a similarity which both reinforces the idea of Rivera's European models and shows the way he has created an eclectic hybrid montage of forms and adapted religious symbolism for a secular nationalistic message. The symbolic reductionism of the 'peasant/Indian' into a condensed figure fusing race, class and religious iconography is heavily loaded with political connotations (fig.3.33). One peasant's back is scarred with marks (fig. 3.32) which link him symbolically with the wounds of religious martyrs. The 'peasant/Indian' is standing on the plinth where the transcendent eagle perches and the iridescent yellow in his 'halo' is linked to the gold of the visually dominant bird. In this way colour creates a link and reinforces the idea of a timeless 'golden age' through the symbolism of resplendent yellow in zones 2 and 4.

To deepen understanding of the racial representations and socio-cultural assumptions in the mural, further elements of Smith's universal theory of national identity will be applied. The whole

experience of moving upwards out of disorder and chaotic degeneracy is augmented by the physical qualities of the architectural form of the enclosing stairway. The material qualities of the architectural space utilised by Rivera reinforce the element of ethno-symbolic mythology in the mural which creates an ideology of a new age, which, in the case of the post-revolutionary government was integrally bound to the creation of an 'inclusive' vision of a unified people informed by the rhetoric of *indigenismo*. The nationalist mythology described by Smith as moving out from a fallen past to an ordered new age ruled by a cathartic reason and harmony within the community is completed with the final pause on the balcony. The physical and emotional experience is of moving out of the disorder of battle and action and into viewing a gallery of historical figures.

Restoring Order

A process of change in aesthetic response is experienced as the observer progresses through the mural from the chaos of the lower scenes to the order of the balcony. The physical progress through the mural parallels and reinforces the depiction of the nationalist mythological process delineated by the element of ethno-mythology which Smith names 'A Myth of Decline, or *How We Fell into a State of Decay*' towards 'A Myth of Regeneration, or *How to Restore the Golden Age and Renew Our Community as in the Days of Old*' (Smith 1999: 67). The representation of this development in zones 1, 2 and 3 is reinforced in zones 4 and 5. The narrative sequence of this aspect of nationalist myth is described by Smith as the return to the old heroic values lost through the fall into a degenerate state but regenerated

through acts of the heroic elite (Smith 1999: 67). The elite are represented in zone 4 by Vicente Guerrero (1782-1831)⁴³ who faces the peasants and is brandishing his sword. This individual leader points the way for the 'peasant/Indian' and is juxtaposed with other key figures of the era of Mexican Independence and contextualised with a plethora of the historical leaders from other significant periods depicted in zone 5.

This homogenising nationalist mythology has more serious undertones as its implicit reductionism and the attendant cultural assumptions obscure the complex reality of racial groups in Mexico and deny their true identities and social needs. Paradoxically, this depiction of the poor as angelic and transcendent places them beyond society in a passive stance, thus reducing their social being. The critical observer may be aware of the degradation of such reductionism where an opening for critique is found in the spaces left by the conspicuous absence of differentiated characters and the questions stimulated by such omissions.

The reflexive reader decodes what is not 'said' in this visual essay by reading in between the lines, form and colour. This particular racial reductionism of the peasant/Indian creates a mono-dimensional representation which contains elements which can be understood as the provocative notion of 'pornography of the poor',⁴⁴ as the image is passive, reduced and produced in the context of a power relation. As the creator of a vision the artist is at once 'revolutionary' and a

⁴³ Vicente Guerrero was one of the capable military men who supported José Mariá Morelos y Pavón and continued to fight until Mexico achieved independence in 1821.

⁴⁴ This provocative phrase is employed colloquially by photographers.

product of his time, inheriting vestiges of the dominant discourse and the historical legacy of racism which exists amongst the more enlightened aspects of *indigenista* thought. The whiteness of the figures, their simplicity and the angelic symbolism encoded in colour and shape reduce the figures. This effect is produced by encoding them with the infantilising symbolic connotations of white such as purity and innocence or the angel which transcends existing beyond space, time and citizenship. The homogenised representation, like pornography, distorts the multi-dimensional complexity and humanity of the figures. They are objects to be enjoyed and controlled by the powerful gaze of the onlooker through a vision circumscribed by the restricted, socio-psychical focus of Rivera's historically specific imagination. In this particular stance the facelessness of the peasants is literal as they stand with their backs to the viewer. The supposed glorification of the 'peasant/ Indian' is in reality the white in a 'black and white' dichotomy which may denigrate or elevate but in both cases has the same outcome of obfuscating the realities of racism.

The homogenising category of 'Indian' was introduced by elite groups and gained renewed acceptance in the nineteenth century due to meagre economic resources which excluded the majority of Mexico's poor from the advantages of national identity. Race and class factors were fused and the metropolitan middle and upper classes categorised any poor peasant as 'Indian' 'which came to mean those who were not complete citizens' (Lomnitz 2001: 52). The peasants in zone 4 combine the dark skin of the 'Indian' with the archetypal dress of the peasant/worker hence fusing race and class in a homogenising representation reminiscent of the economic category of peasant/Indian.

The central arch (zone 5a fig. 3. 34), found above zone 4 in the composition, houses the key historical figures of the era of Mexican Independence, which is highly significant considering the culturally specific representation of race in zone 4. The 'peasant/Indian' is face to face with the powerful figures of history but not in dialogue. The leaders are clearly depicted as historical characters. The 'peasant/Indian' appears to be passively looking for leadership. The implication is that the infantilised 'peasant/Indian' needs leadership as she/he has no autonomy. The white figures are looking up to their historical leaders amongst whom can be seen tokenistic fragments of 'peasant/Indian' identity such as the hats which are intermittently present in each zone. This element of racial identity is described by Smith's theory of socio-mythological ethno-symbolism which shows how a 'special identity' is reflected in the relationship between the figures in zone 4 and zone 5. The elite 'nationalist spokesmen claim the right to a particular freedom' to develop 'a specific culture through an ethnically responsive press, judiciary, church and educational system' combined with 'an ethnically aware literature and art' (Smith 1999: 68). The mural may be seen as coinciding with this component of Smith's theory of ethno-mythology; elite figures appear to be responding to the needs of the 'peasant/Indian' by leading them into an enlightened future: Guerrero and José María Morelos y Pavón (1765-1815) point toward the Left Wall, upon which a Marxist utopia is depicted. The passive peasants are depicted as being led by the elite figures of history into a new age of order and rationality which is represented by the stalwart upright stances of the 'founding fathers' of history portrayed in zone 5. The critical viewer may, however, read this

relationship between leaders and led in a different way, hence decoding the socio-cultural mythology. The interaction between the 'ethnic' 'Indian' and the 'elite' spokesmen, heroes, martyrs and leaders may be read as a dominant/passive power relation rather than a responsive, dynamic interaction as the ethno-mythology suggests. The influential characters of history are given individuality and presence through clothes and distinguishing features. These distinguished figures return the gaze of the onlooker who stands face to face with them on the balcony. Conversely the 'Indian' is recognised as a collective body, passive and faceless, gazed upon by the viewer but never directly returning the gaze. The expressions and characterisation of the figures in zone 5 are highly significant in relation to the passive and active audience. The emotional impact of contrasts is intensified by the visual tensions of stark changes in colour. The 'purity' and angelic connotations encoded in the white suits and 'haloes' of the 'Indian/peasants' place them outside society whereas the dark attire of the leaders seems more earthly due to the contrast. The sober black suits of the men in zone 5 add to the sense of stability and seriousness of these characters; the sombre tones indicate an absence of frivolity, they are encoded with a special, formal dignity. The illuminated section of white and gold colours in zones 3 and 4 acts as a foil to the solemn darker tones.

The Five Arches: Zones 5 a-e

Zone 5a: The Legacy of Independence

Over forty figures are crowded into the central arch that makes up zone 5a. There are a variety of different skin tones and styles of

clothing represented in this panel. To the right of the viewer at the front, lower corner a dark haired man holds a red flag with a dark blue cross and a central white skull and cross bones. Next to him stand three men with darker skin tones; the one nearest to the central arch points his arm parallel to the direction of the sword in zone 4. At the top of this arch, a man wearing blue overalls and a cap also points in the same direction. His head is facing in the opposite direction towards three prominent faces and one more hidden face. Three of the figures wear large, yellow brimmed hats and one a smaller black hat. Two men with distinctive moustaches hold a red banner with white letters spelling 'tierra y libertad' (land and freedom). Many other faces, which at first appear indistinguishable, merge into the crowd.

Two figures in black suits with white shirts stand together in the left of the arch. Below them a figure in a red shirt with a blue coat holds a turquoise flag with a golden eagle at its tip. Just beneath the top of the flag is a fair skinned man wearing a red and gold hat and clothing. Other figures on this same plane include the profile of a woman with her hair scraped back, a man in a blue uniform with gold epaulettes, holding a white, open scroll and a central white haired man. Next to him is a large, yellow flag with a lance-like tip.

The historical figures in zone 5a (fig. 3.34) represent the legacy of the Independence era, such as Father Miguel Hidalgo (1753-1811) the educated, rebellious preacher who initiated the struggle for Mexican Independence in 1810. The famed priest holds the chains of slavery and stands behind vines a symbol of the way he resisted colonial agricultural practices (Kirkwood 2000: 80). To the right stands Morelos who led the uprising after Hidalgo was executed in 1811. Next to

Morelos and Hidalgo, the figure in blue uniform holding a scroll resembles the young Antonio López de Santa Anna who is depicted again in zone 5b where his later political role is explained. Morelos, who was also an educated priest, surrounded himself with military men who are represented here by the figure of Guerrero who as I have observed, uses his sword to point the way to the left wall in a gesture of guidance to the on-looking 'peasant/Indians'; Guerrero's gesture is echoed by the parallel arm of the man above who wears the blue overalls reminiscent of Russian workers. Three revolutionary martyrs stand behind the banner reading 'tierra y libertad'. The most famous of these, Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919) was the leader of the 1910-1917 agrarian uprising in Morelos and was immortalized as a legendary martyr and hero with quasi-messianic status. Beside Zapata stands Felipe Carillo Puerto (1872-1924), progressive governor of Yucatan and José G. Rodríguez, Communist agrarian leader. The men in dark suits in the top left are Calles and Obregón standing together shoulder to shoulder. Standing below in red and gold regal costume is Emperor Agustín de Iturbide (1783-1824) who was the first head of state after Independence (1821-1823) and whose *Plan de Iguala* gave Spaniards ample guarantees of full inclusion in the new republic (and who adopted the Aztec eagle with a crown). Below Iturbide is the profile of Doña Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez (1764-1829), who informed the Querétaro conspirators of the order to arrest them. This vignette in zone 5a shows the historical situation in the 1820s when the 'popular radicals' and backers of Morelos wanted to put into operation a liberal system of government based on that of the United States (Lomnitz 2001: 29).

Moving on to discuss the remaining archways (zones 5b–5e), flanking the central arch, I will be considering Rivera's use of 'territory' and the importance of this element in the construction of his socio-political vision of the Mexican nation. I will be applying Smith's universal theory of ethno-symbolic mythology, to the specific context of the post-revolutionary re-invention of the ideology of the Mexican people with particular focus on the representation of race. Firstly, the aesthetic and historical content of the zones will be discussed in turn then the sociological aspects of all four areas will be analysed together.

Zone 5b: The Reform and the Era of Benito Juárez

Fifteen dark suited men stand in rows at the back of the crowded space of zone 5b: the area directly to the left of the central arch (fig. 3.35). In the background a large domed building can be seen against the sky. Many upright spear-shaped objects reach into the sky bearing orange flags. One dark skinned figure holds a paper on which is written 'Constitución Leyes de Reforma' (fig. 3.36). Below this figure are three men; one is very large, tonsured and wears a brown monk's robe, the second wears a military uniform similar to the main figure in zone 5a, the third wears white robes and a mitre with a cross on it. The first two of these figures are looking at a pile of gold coins, above which two circular hats can be seen. Just below the money is a large yellow bundle carried on the back of a dark skinned man dressed in simple white. Alongside this figure is a woman wearing a plain brown skirt, her back is also bent under the load she is carrying.

This section depicts the era of Mexican Reform (1855–1876) and shows characters from both sides of the struggle representing both

‘reactionary’ and ‘progressive’ forces. Amongst the leaders of the Reform stands the dark-skinned Benito Juárez twice president of Mexico (1856-1862) and (1867-1872). Juárez holds a proclamation which announces the reform laws following the 1857 Constitution. The oversized man is a Dominican Monk depicting the greed of the Catholic Church. Standing next to him is the dictator Santa Anna who ruled Mexico several times (1833-1855). Archbishop Labastida is the white-robed figure who was a defender of the wealth and privilege of the Catholic Church. Amongst the other figures stand Miguel Miramón an anti-reformist general and Juan Álvarez who led the Southern forces against Santa Anna. In the background the dome of a church being demolished can be distinguished on the skyline, representing the destruction of the institution of the Catholic Church.

Zone 5c: The Porfirian Era and the Revolution

Zone 5c is found on the left of the central arch (fig. 3.37). This zone is the most crowded of the five archways and contains upwards of forty characters. It contains the faces of many men; some of whom hold up papers with writing which is barely legible. The profile of a stern looking woman can be seen in the crowd. A pale man in a top hat stands between two figures in military uniform who hold up swords the shapes and angles of which are echoed in a line of swords in the background. On the skyline is an urban landscape of industrial buildings and pylons, a church, oil derricks and a *tienda de raya*.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The *tienda de raya* was a long-standing institution which was a company or *hacienda* store from which peasants were compelled to buy their provisions, largely on credit so their indebtedness kept them in a state of subjection to the elite landowners.

The scene shows the Porfirian era and the revolutionary characters who overthrew this regime amongst many others. Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, the president of Mexico in 1872 after the death of Juárez, stands just below the stately figure and whitened face of Díaz in his military uniform. The *Porfiriato* the period of dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) was dedicated to the idea of ‘order and progress’ and replete with racist rationalisations. Next to Díaz on the right is José Limantour, his finance minister, and Victoriano Huerta, Francisco Madero’s assassin. Below the president’s white glove are the positivist advisors los científicos. Other Díaz supporters are shown here: Guillermo Prieto the journalist, Gabino Barreda, apostle of positivism and Justo Sierra, minister of education. On Díaz’s right hand side, his wife’s face in profile is the only female represented in zone 5c.

Francisco Madero, instigator of the 1910 revolution, stands just to the right of the centre of this archway wearing a presidential sash. Madero discussed Mexico’s political problems in a 1909 publication, *The Presidential Succession in 1910*, following the James Creelman interview in 1908, in which 78-year-old Díaz explained he was about to retire and that Mexico was capable of democratic politics. The book sparked the beginning of Madero’s political career and the formation of the Anti-Re-electionist party, which eventually led to Díaz’s downfall. Vasconcelos, who was discussed extensively in Chapter One, is depicted just below him. Alvaro Obregón stands below Madero who he admired and followed. To the right of Vasconcelos is the celebrated graphic artist Posada the political satirist of the Porfiriato and the early Revolutionary years who was a great inspiration to Rivera and Orozco. Next to him holding revolutionary pamphlets are the anarchist

Flores Magón brothers and Felipe Carrillo Puerto, radical governor of Yucatán who holds the banner on which is inscribed the words, “TIERRA LIBERTAD Y PAN PARA TODOS”, (land, liberty and bread for all) (fig.3.38). Zapata, the famed revolutionary icon, is portrayed again in this archway wearing a sombrero next to a depiction of Otilio Montaño holding the ‘PLAN DE AYALA’ which he wrote in 1911 demanding radical rights for peasant communities. Pancho Villa the notorious macho general of the Revolution who led the revolt in Chihuahua and central, northern Mexico is portrayed also wearing a sombrero, two rows down from Zapata and to his left. Venustiano Carranza, interim president of Mexico (1916) and legitimate president (1917-1920), is painted with his white beard just below the grinning, Villa. Carranza grasps a paper upon which is written the titles of two important articles of the 1917 constitution. Article 123 was a constitutional attempt to achieve a welfare state and Article 27 which contained radical land reform measures.

Zone 5d: The United States Invasion (1846-1848)

A crowd of men fire guns out of the scene in zone 5d (fig. 3.39) and several men wearing dark blue or white tunics lie wounded or dead at their feet. Another man, who is wearing a navy blue military hat and uniform embellished with yellow trims, white trousers and black boots, faces out of the mural in the direction of the gunshots. White clouds surround the guns and a castle that can be seen on the skyline. An eagle appears to fly from the right into the pictorial space. This section represents the United States’ invasion of Mexico between 1846 and 1848. Chapultepec Castle can be seen in the distance amongst the

clouds over which the American eagle descends on the battle scene grasping arrows. The defenders of Mexico City include peasants, dressed in civilian clothing, and soldiers in uniform. The tall figure at the front of the scene is Nicolás Bravo, Mexican president (1842-1843 and 1846) who commanded the defence of the Castle.

**Zone 5e: The French Invasion and the Empire Under Maximilian
(1862-1867)**

A line of guns pointing out of the mural space in zone 5e reflects the silhouettes in zone 5d on the opposite edge of the composition. There is an eagle surrounded by clouds in both these sections: the one in this zone 5d flies into the mural space, while the other, in this zone, is positioned as if flying out of the panel's border. On closer inspection, it can be seen that this eagle wears a crown. Two bare-backed men wearing white trousers and brimmed, yellow hats kneel at the base of the row of guns. They are the only distinctive figures aiming guns out of the picture in this line. Three dark-skinned, standing men are facing in the opposite direction looking into the composition. One of these two men points a gun at three dark-suited figures, the most prominent of which is fair skinned with a blond beard.

In this zone the forces of Juárez fight the Hapsburg Emperor Maximilian and the French army of Napoleon III. Maximilian stands with his light beard, ready to be executed at Querétaro. The Hapsburg eagle takes flight from Mexico in 1867. It was not until 1867, after the French departed and Maximilian was shot, that Mexico finally earned its 'right' to exist as a nation. Until that time no strong central state

had existed and the country's sovereignty was severely limited' (Lomnitz 2001: 87).

Overview of Zone 5

Many amongst this pantheon of heroes, presidents and martyrs throughout zone 5 return the gaze of the onlooker on the balcony. In all the arches comprising zone 5, the juxtaposition of historical figures redraws the historical map by compressing figures and by placing, shoulder to shoulder, the most incongruent combinations such as Díaz and his arch enemy Madero. A type of 'whole community' is represented in which the elite figures are characterised largely both by their collective and individual forms. Thus a 'new' community is 'created' as the historic leaders stand on the foundations of their common descent represented by the *mestizo* in zone 3 who is the child of the miscegenation between two diverse worlds.

Zone 5 must be considered in relation to zone 4 as the elite figures dominate the representation of history. Rivera's stylistic depiction of history had antecedents presented in both literary and visual forms. The historical representation is reminiscent of *El libro rojo* (1870) written by Vicente Riva Palacio and Manuel Paynó, who led the manufacture of a new history of Mexico at the time. The 'pantheon of martyrs' in *El libro rojo* included protagonists from both sides of the struggle (Hidalgo, Iturbide, Cuauhtémoc) and was aimed at unifying elites. Ideologically this course was followed by Díaz (Tenorio-Trillo 1996 in Lomnitz 2001: 239). 'The unification of elites involved taming the nation's war-torn past and projecting this freshly rebuilt past into the present in order to shape a modernising frontier' (Lomnitz 2001: 241). In the surrounding contours of zones 5d and 5e, a compositional

frontier is shaped into the outline of the Central Panel, which demarcates the cultural-mythological, borders of the portrait of the nation.

Leaders and Villains, Heroes and the Homeland

Under the gaze of Zapata the audience is reminded of the famed Article 27 of the constitution which promised great land reforms. Leaders, heroes and martyrs represented in zone 5 provide the 'touchstone of virtue and heroism' which light the way for the quest for regeneration (Smith 1999: 65). The 'golden age' can only be recovered by deriving meaning which links heroes past and present. 'Heroes provide models of virtuous conduct, their deeds of valour inspire faith and courage in their oppressed and decadent descendants' (Smith 1999: 65). The upright stance and the gaze that is returned by many figures to the onlooker links the heroes in zones 2 and 5. In contrast, the eyes of the 'peasant/Indian' are concealed from the viewer and the facelessness encoded in this homogenising stance is in keeping with the facet of nationalist mythology in which the heroic qualities of leadership are lacking in the general populace. The inspiration of heroes was brought to the people through the socio-cultural mythology of this visual narrative. The heroes embodied 'those qualities of courage, wisdom, self-sacrifice, zeal, and stoicism which [were] felt to be conspicuously lacking in the present generation, and which seemed to act as an antidote to oppression and a spur to liberation' (Smith 1999: 66). The figure of the 'peasant/Indian' is represented as lacking and 'silenced' by absence of expression and individual differentiation.

The surrounding borders of the upper part of the Central Panel (zones 5a and 5e) are delineated by the jagged line of the guns which ward off foreign interests represented by the United States, the Hapsburgs and the French. This creates a definitive boundary around the sovereign nation which wards 'them' away from 'us' in the closed community of Mexican people. The protective placing of the people inside this defended zone is in keeping with the claim to 'specific territories' which is a vital component of nationalist ethno-mythology according to Smith.

The mirroring of form, colour and content in zones 5d and 5e adds to the sense of order and balanced rationality experienced from the balcony view. The symmetry and equilibrium contrast starkly with the movement and entanglement of figures in the lower zones and add to the sense of respite after leaving disorder.

Areas within zone 5 reinforce the formulation of a 'special territory', thus the banner stating 'Tierra y Libertad' and the written laws of the Independence and the Revolutionary Constitution are represented as 'charters for collective aspirations and actions' which 'validate, even direct the struggle for land and recognition' (Smith 1999: 69). The placing of landmarks such as Chapultepec Castle, the oil rigs and church clearly mark out a territory. This homeland is also the ground for claims to a 'specific autonomy' in which a community has restored 'ancient, lost rights and freedoms' (Smith 1999: 70) which in the National Palace are represented as those 'golden days' lost during the Conquest. The pylons in the background of zone 5c link this national territorial freedom to a modernising industrialism.

Transculturation and Trajectory

Rivera drew inspiration from a wide range of historical resources in painting *History of the Mexican People*. Rivera would have had access to the canonical works by Goya and Manet in Spain and Germany respectively (fig. 3.41 and 3.42). A trajectory of influence in structure and style can be traced through Goya to Manet to Rivera. As Janis Tomlinson points out:

One might wonder whether Manet would have painted the Execution of Maximilian [...] for exhibition in the Salon, without Goya's example of the Third of May 1808 [...] would Manet have dared to paint the subject, without the sanction that Goya's precedent seemed to provide? (1994: 294)

Rivera's bold criticism of Calles later in zone 10 is testimony that he did not need the precedent of Manet or Goya in order to build up courage in political subject matter, however, the similarities reveal other points of political interest with regard to Rivera's work. This pictorial quotation of the execution of Maximilian is further testimony to the fact that the artist drew on the Western nineteenth-century academic canon throughout his work in the National Palace a fact which has strong implications on his portrayal of the indigenous peoples of Mexico who in zones 5a and 5b are transformed into a 'universal' soldier in a European mould, which eradicates cultural and historical specificity and diversity. This drawing on European sources

from the nineteenth century consolidates the idea that Rivera's allegedly *new* vision is comprised of elements of continuity rather than the revolutionary rupture he professes.

Chapter Four: Prehispanic Mexico

Cuando muere una lengua,
 las cosas divinas,
 estrellas, sol y luna,
 las cosas humanas,
 pensar y sentir,
 no se reflejan ya
 en ese espejo.

(León- Portilla in Ross 2002: 12) ⁴⁶

The Right Panel of the National Palace Mural, entitled *Prehispanic Mexico* (fig. 4.1), was painted between 1929 and 1930 and was the first part of the triptych series in the stairway grandly entitled *History of the Mexican People*. This section of the fresco is 7.49 x 9.00m. It is a vast, towering wall yet appears far less significant than the massive *Mexico from the Conquest to 1930*, due to its oblique, dimly lit position and simplified design. The contrasting, Central Panel of the stairwell itself is an illuminated reservoir, holding light passing from the open quadrangle through the central balcony and falling onto different areas. Lighting superimposes a distinct character over each of the three parts of the triptych. The Right and Left Walls are obliquely lit and therefore in relative obscurity compared to the Central Wall. The nature of lighting involves the substance and colours of the lit surface itself; there is a predominance of relatively pale tones on the Right Wall

⁴⁶ Translated from an anonymous Aztec Poem.

interspersed with very dark skin tones. Every section of colour is blocked and there is little tonal differentiation within each shade.

The viewer is temporarily poised in the stairwell in front of *Prehispanic Mexico*, looking amidst a flight of stairs, where the structure is designed for ascent. This encourages the viewer to move on to the more lofty perspective of the balcony. The dynamism of the scene is therefore accentuated as the viewer is given no clues as to an ideal viewing perspective and is inclined to move around and experience the multiple perspectives inherent in looking whilst moving. This urge to move upwards towards the balcony is particularly intense when viewing the Right Wall with its relative shadowed obscurity compared to the recently-viewed Central Panel. It is possible to view Prehispanic Mexico from the stairwell of the Left Wall opposite but yet again the view is slightly obscured by architecture. Movement upwards is encouraged as these strong visual cues suggest that the balcony will be a better position.

To see *Prehispanic Mexico* in its entirety, the viewer must ascend the stairway and stand on the balcony. Here the onlooker is positioned at a more distanced, contemplative viewpoint than the restricted territory of a limited field of vision close-up on the stairwell. The relative simplicity and clear, compositional serenity of this wall is accentuated by contrast with the densely populated overlapping figures of the Central Panel. Once the loftier, more panoramic vista is established, the onlooker can explore the various clusters engaged in myriad forms of creative activity which are arranged around the central figure of Quetzalcóatl in a largely circular configuration.

After an outline of Rivera's sources for *Prehispanic Mexico*, I will analyse the Right Wall in a clockwise direction (fig 4.1a). Starting with a discussion of the multidimensional deity and Mesoamerican mythology portrayed in zone 6. This will be followed with an explanation of the portrayal of Prehispanic arts, which I have designated as zone 7; finally, I undertake an investigation of zone 8, which shows warfare, tribute and sacrifice. The second section of this chapter will further develop the aesthetic and historical aspects of the images through an application of socio-cultural theory. Smith's theory of nationalist ethnomythology will illuminate the socio-historical understanding of *Prehispanic Mexico* in the context of post-revolutionary Mexican cultural politics.

Prehispanic Mexico depicts scenes amalgamated from pre-Columbian Mexico and includes features from Aztec, Toltec and Mayan cultures. 'Ever since his return to Mexico in 1921 Rivera had been fascinated by pre-Columbian art and had spent every penny he could scrape together to purchase it' (Marnham 1998: 320). Marnham suggests that he 'found the same inspiration in pre-Columbian art that Picasso had found in African art' (1999: 321). Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) incorporated the ceremonial masks of the Dogon tribe into his landmark cubist work, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907-09). The influence of African art on Cubism was certainly something Rivera was aware of and he had met Picasso in Paris in 1914, and the Spanish artist expressed great admiration for his work. However, Marnham's assertion of a parallel between the use of indigenous themes and artefacts overlooks the dimension of Mexican cultural specificity in Rivera's fascination which was deeply embroiled with the

social structures of Mexican nationalism and its representation of indigenous peoples in the social and intellectual context of *indigenismo*. Rivera asserts that he was not only enthusiastic about his representation of Mexico's past but also meticulous in his historical research:

I took care to authenticate every detail by exact research, because I wanted to leave no opening for anyone to try to discredit the murals as a whole by the charge that any detail was a fabrication. (Rivera 1991: 101)

It has been observed that Rivera was scrupulous in his attempts to reintroduce an 'authentic' pre-Hispanic image and possibly 'the first to depict an archaeologically accurate image of an Aztec deity' when, in 1923, he painted Xochipilli, the flower god, on the stairway of the Ministry of Public Education (Brown 1986: 141).

Rivera would have been informed of indigenous art forms through various sources including travel, museums, artefacts and codices. In November 1921, Vasconcelos 'set off on one of his voyages of cultural exploitation and propaganda to the peninsula of Yucatán and invited several painters and poets, Rivera among them' (Wolfe 1939: 148). Stanton L. Catlin describes how the presence of aspects of large-scale Italian quattrocento painting can also be seen in Rivera's *Palacio de Cortés* mural at Cuernavaca entitled *The History of Cuernavaca and Morelos* (1930-1931). This influence is also clear throughout the National Palace Mural which Rivera was painting during the same period and in which such elements as 'his concern for solid,

overlapping figures, and for the representation of two or more related events in a compositional frame or stage unified in extended space or time' which along with:

[...] much of the color, taste and objectivity of quattrocento painting [which] can be seen, [and] remained basic to his organisational structure and an integral part of his sensibility; in their fusion with indigenous elements, they become effective aids in the formation of his conception and the transmission of Mexican values. (Catlin 1978: 207)

The availability of Mesoamerican literature to the public was a relatively new phenomenon in the post-revolutionary period. Brown argues that Rivera took many ideas from 'ceramic figurines such as those he collected and housed at Anahuacalli' (1986: 139). The significance of the construction of his personal museum of prehispanic artefacts will be discussed later in the chapter. Brown goes on to cite his most important sources as 'the painted books he saw in European collections or studied from such reproductions as those published by Lord Kingsborough in the 19th century' (1986: 139).⁴⁷

Catlin catalogues the material published at the time Rivera began the National Palace Mural (and available to the artist before September 1930) in his analysis of political iconography in Rivera's Cuernavaca Mural. Catlin's inventory significantly includes examples or

⁴⁷ This publication 'included colour reproductions of the *Codex Mendoza*, *Codex Vaticanus* (No. 3738), *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, and other pictorial manuscripts in Oxford, Berlin, Vienna, Dresden, Liverpool, Rome, and Paris; the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, Junta de Colombino edition, in *Antigüedades Mexicanas* (1892)' (Catlin 1978: 198).

representations of reproduced codices with commentaries among these, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* and the *Matrícula de Tributos*, both in the National Museum (Catlin 1978: 198). He also cites popular Mexican painting, sculpture, and graphic art as well as artefacts of ritual or practical daily use either continuing pre-Conquest traditions or assimilating colonial and eighteenth century work:

Among monuments of pre-Columbian art and architecture and their traditions, the remains of Aztec and pre-Aztec architecture, particularly the Aztec temple of Teopanzocolo at Cuernavaca; Aztec sculpture in the National Museum and elsewhere; Indian popular art and artefacts of use. (Catlin 1978: 198)

Rivera would also have had access to the scholarly publications of students of Indian languages especially Nahuatl who were working on the ancient texts, Eduard Seler's *Gessammelte Abhandlungen* (1904) in Germany and Sahagún's *Codex Florentino* in the Paso y Troncoso edition of 1905-1907; Sahagún's *Matritense*, *Primeros Memoriales* in the same edition; the *Codex Mendoza* in the Galindo y Villa edition (1925), with the Paso y Troncoso facsimile in black and white. This body of literature was slowly developing as a serious subject for consideration and '[a] systematic, scientific interpretation of the past through its written sources was being launched on a small scale (Horcasitas 1980: xv).

Rivera was also familiar with the *Popul Vuh* (Book of the People), the ancient Maya sacred text as he illustrated a 1931 version of this

manuscript which contains many references to Quetzalcóatl. Rivera combines both realistic and stylized representation of his characters in the National Palace Mural. Catlin argues that 'he applied these norms in two ways: a more naturalistic treatment on the one hand, for themes identified with more foreign and private interests, and, on the other, more stylized treatment for those associated with indigenous values and potentialities' (1978: 207). It is clear, however, from the similarity between the figures Rivera depicts in *Prehispanic Mexico* and the depiction of people in the codices cited above, that the artist's claim to authenticity in representing the Mesoamerican past was, in this sense, well-substantiated. The degree to which this attempt was achieved will be discussed in the second section of this chapter.

Ideologically 'Indian'?

Prehispanic Mexico in its relative simplicity and economy of style highlights the use of symbolism which draws on the pre-Columbian styles present in the codices that Rivera consulted. The use of symbolism drawn from pre-Columbian sources and stylisation of the 'Indian' in Rivera's work is described by Catlin as having an 'indigenous and thus ideological character' (Catlin 1978: 207). Although Catlin does not expand as to what he means by this, it is true to say that the representation of the indigenous people of Mexico was integral to the creation of a nationalist hegemony. The stylisation of indigenous elements meant that Rivera used these more as a design method than a true representation of indigenous meaning. The ideological discourse within which this condensed imagery is enmeshed will be discussed in detail in the second section. In

Prehispanic Mexico Rivera creates superficially realistic depictions of the indigenous past as I will demonstrate through zones 6 to 8, many are directly influenced by the codices. There is a strong element of stylisation as the figures from various Mesoamerican sources are combined to create an idealised, amalgamated vision of the past which must be considered in context with the other time zones of past, present and future represented in other sections of the mural. Many features of varied cultures are amalgamated and their original meanings changed to suit the remit of nation building and forging Mexican identity.

Throughout the entire mural triptych, *History of the Mexican People*, Rivera employs a more generic and stylised depiction of indigenous figures in contradistinction to the more detailed realism in depicting both foreigners and the politically 'powerful' such as Quetzalcóatl. The clothing, physique, physiognomy and demeanour of indigenous figures have the same distinctive, homogenous stylisation throughout the mural.

The pre-Columbian sources Rivera studied clearly informed the subject matter, stylisation and use of colour in *Prehispanic Mexico*. Interestingly, however, the codices' influence is evident rather than that of Mesoamerican mural art. Catlin states that the sources he preferred were colonial images rather than pre-Columbian; and '[a]mong the pictorial codices, he seems consistently to have preferred those from after the Conquest and under European influence rather than the complex hieratic images of the pre-Conquest documents' (1978: 210). However, as Brown (1986) explains, these were more readily available to the artist and he did also make use of various pre-

Columbian artefacts which he faithfully reproduced in his work. On the Right Wall of the National Palace mural the sources of the *Codex Florentino* and the *Codex Mendoza* can be distinctly recognised and will be referred to throughout this piece.

The remainder of this chapter will apply a Prownian analysis to *Prehispanic Mexico*, including aesthetic, historical and socio-cultural dimensions.

Zone 6: Man-god

The Right Wall composition is encircled around a semi-stylised, bearded man with pale skin (fig. 4.1). This cross-legged figure is painted in the central, vertical plane. His flamboyantly dressed body and ceremonial green, plumed headdress merge with the pyramid behind. In his right hand he holds an engraved, curved mitre decorated with shells. His robe has an elaborate collar adorned with coloured feathers. This majestic figure is bejewelled with a pectoral which is ornamented with a white spiral design, surrounded by red and blue circles respectively. His regal face stares out at the viewer and he is encircled by a crowd of kneeling people.

In zone 6 (fig. 4.2) the gaze of the surrounding entourage is inward and looks towards the central figure their white-clad backs face the viewer and their faces are shown in three-quarter profile (fig 4.2). The bodies of the followers are curled-over in a gesture of adoration. The two rows of devotees flanking the heroic-looking personality are painted elliptically as backs and heads are co-ordinated in a reflective cohort augmenting the sense of balance which characterises the whole panel. One of these followers holds a votive offering to the central

character; the others are listening to wise counsel or basking in the presence of his greatness. Above the majestically seated figure, the horizon marks the interface between the sky and earth. The scene includes iconographical language reminiscent of the conventions of Mesoamerican codices. The horizon is mountainous and depicts a volcano, backed by a deep blue sky and prominent blazing sun. The volcano is painted pale-grey and spits fire. Emerging from the flames is a ferocious creature with a colourful feathered mane. This strange being resembles a dragon, a serpent or some supernatural hybrid. The ominous sharp teeth and forked tongue of its monstrous form are duplicated in the face of the bizarre, serpentine creature flying towards the edge of the panel. The torso of a man resembling the seated hero below is perched on this airborne being. This god/man, or half-serpent/half-man holds a sceptre in his right hand and a shield in his left with the white conch shell design on a red background. His helmet-like headdress, shield and back are adorned with green feathers which are raised by the wind or movement.

In zone 6, the blue heavens contain bold, symbolic figures which embody distinct features of Aztec cosmology. The characters portray another tale which is simultaneously cosmological, universal and temporal as it survives throughout history via the medium of mythology. The rising sun, blazing volcano and departing feathered serpent are all captured in a moment as they are depicted at once ascending, burning and hovering.

In the sky of zone 6, a dramatic series of events unfolds. The dragon's fiery spirit and forked tongue are duplicated in the mouth the

flying serpent. The hybrid creature flies away from the central solar disc toward the east.

Mesoamerican Cosmology: Ce Actl Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl

The central figure can be identified as the multi-dimensional god Quetzalcóatl, who is well known in Mexican cosmology and mythology. Kukulcan is the Maya word for Quetzalcóatl: '*Kuk* [quetzal] *ul* [feather] *can* [serpent]' (Landa quoted in von Hagen 1973: 307). Quetzalcóatl is also known by the Yucatec-Maya and the Quiche-Maya as Gucumatz or Náxít also represents the Plumed Serpent in these cultures. This figure carries many connotations including vegetal renewal and an ancient corn god, religious prestige and political or military office. In the chronicles written by the Cakchiqueles and Quichés, the names Kukulcán, Gucumatz, or Náxít, Plumed Serpent or Quetzalcóatl refer to an earthly Captain who not only had supernatural powers but also conquered and waged war, founded cities that were transformed into the heads of kingdoms, and built grandiose temples that bear his name. Florescano holds that:

The origin of this character, his emblem, and attributes converge at Tula, the Toltec capital and the prototype for Tollan, the wonderful city where, according to Toltec songs spread by the Aztecs, the symbol of imperial grandeur, the force of military power, the prestige of a sacred site, the abundance of material goods, and the splendour of

civilisation were all joined in one place. (Florescano 1984: 149)⁴⁸

The story of the High Priest Quetzalcóatl describes the earthly culture hero who reigned in the metropolis of Tula between 900AD and 1200AD and who had 'derived his name from that of a benevolent god whose cult he preached' (Léon-Portilla 1980: 42).⁴⁹ This Topiltzin attained the throne of Tula around 1150 AD and was the last ruler of the city before its fall.

The serene compositional balance of the scene depicted in zone 6, accentuates the image of a cohesive society in which the populace, leader, costume, architecture and nature exist in a unified scene with internally echoing contours. All these aspects fuse together in a tapering shape, the visual unity of which suggests a cultural unity. The pyramid portrayed here is Aztec in architectural style with a distinctive box-like shrine at the summit which had one door and no windows (Davies 1982: 201). This hybrid depiction of the Toltec Quetzalcóatl merged with the Aztec pyramids an example of Rivera blending elements from various locations and times as the Toltec civilisation was the forerunner of the Aztecs.

⁴⁸ 'The Toltecs occupied Chichen Itza in the Yucatán Peninsula about A.D. 1000. This occupation *did* involve some form of military conquest [...] *every* element of Toltec culture is found in Chichen' (Davies 1982: 61).

⁴⁹ Although the priest Ce Atl Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl originated in Tula, diverse manifestations of Ehécatl-Quetzalcóatl appeared, many other Mesoamerican cities: the so-called Plumed Serpent in Teotihuacan, constructed in the middle of the second century A.D., is represented with symbols that we will later recognise in monuments at sites and within cultures as different as Xochicalco, Cacaxtla, El Tajín, Tula, Chichen Itza, Cholula and, Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Florescano 1999: 147).

The importance of Quetzalcóatl in Mexican history should not be underestimated. Different references to this man/god and divergent explanations of his life, existed across Mesoamerican cultures. Quetzalcóatl has multi-dimensional qualities as Heyden and Villasenor observe:

Les attributs de ce dieu sont nombreux et variés. C'était un dieu créateur, une divinité céleste comme l'étoile du matin, un dieu de la fertilité, le patron du clergé, et en tant qu'Ehecatl, le vent qui balaie les routes avant la pluie. (1998: 62)

Rivera's depiction combines eclectic elements of style and diverse aspects of Quetzalcóatl's myriad representations in Mesoamerica. Quetzalcóatl himself is distinguished from his votaries by his paler skin in contrast to their dark brown and by his beard and costume. Rivera has combined his realistic depiction, with the stylisation usually restricted to the representation of indigenous peoples in his work. This semi-stylisation/semi-realism imbues the character of Quetzalcóatl with an ambiguity which accentuates the sense of indistinguishable race and mysterious origins. The distinctive staff of the *hombre-dios* (man-god) Quetzalcóatl is depicted here as well as the conch-shell design which is generally connected with his avatar, the wind god Ehécatl. He is most likely giving wise counsel and conveying the *Huehuetlatolli* (The Ancient Word) to his followers. Miguel León-Portilla explains the significance of communal wisdom communicated through *Huehuetlatolli* in Mesoamerican culture:

[...] texts that we attribute to the anonymous endeavours of the groups of priests and sages who resided close to the temples or in the schools are conveyers of Huehuetlatolli, speeches and other forms of expression to communicate the group's wisdom about the gods, particularly the supreme Giver of Life, the norms of behaviour, the principles of education, the beliefs concerning the afterlife, and so forth. (Léon-Portilla 1980: 6)

Various uses of the myth of Quetzalcóatl show the shifting purposes which it played within changing social contexts. I will outline some aspects of the cultural significance of this man-god known as 'supreme priest' and 'hero of civilisation'. Mexican texts describe the figure of Ce Atl Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl as 'the founder and ruler of the ideal kingdom' or Tollan one in which the city is constructed through religious cosmology (Florescano 1999: 56). Quetzalcóatl was the patron god of the *calmecac*, the 'school' where Mesoamerican nobles studied the high offices of the priesthood and political power. Ce Atl Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl left Tula and his *nahualli* (earthly body, receptacle). The story of Quetzalcóatl's downfall records that:

Before Topiltzin's flight, legend relates that a sorcerer, variously described as the Smoking Mirror god, or merely as an old man, gained admittance to the king and showed him his face in a mirror. Appalled by his ravaged mein, he was induced to take a draught of pulque, the sacred drink; in all he drank five times. (Davies 1982: 161)

Ce Actl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (1 Reed, Our Lord Quetzalcoatl) was disgraced whist drunk and left Tollan in the tenth century, announcing that he would return from the east. Cortés arrived in Mexico in the year 1 Actl in the Aztec calendar, which was composed of 52-year cycles in which similar years could be seen to be connected and the year 1 Actl was associated with Quetzalcoatl's birth. The Lord left towards the gulf coast where he both sacrificed himself on a fire and became the planet and god Venus, or he sailed on a raft eastward promising to return. Irene Nicholson points out the dual significance of this transformation:

Later, when Quetzalcoatl had committed the carnal act then repented, he had to descend for eight days into the stone casket, the underworld before he rose up into the sky. We have here on the one hand a physical description of the passing of the planet Venus below the horizon and on the other a symbolic representation of a stage in the soul's pilgrimage. (Nicholson 1967: 91)

In *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of the Mexican National Consciousness (1531 – 1813)* Jacques Lafaye highlights the crucial roles played by the images of both these figures in the claims of various factions to social and political legitimacy. Lafaye discusses the origins of images of Quetzalcóatl in the Mexican national consciousness:

The belief in a pristine evangelisation of the New World by the apostle Saint Thomas resulted from the collation of a series of biblical texts and new facts with ancient beliefs. According to the *Acta Thomae*, this apostle had preached the gospel beyond the Ganges (*supra Gangem*), that is in India. (Lafaye 1974: 177)

This apostolic conception of Quetzalcóatl mainly championed by Fray Diego Dúran and Juan de Tovar continued to develop from the years preceding the conquest down to the end of the eighteenth century. The prevalent Franciscan thought of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and the Fray Juan de Torquemada ⁵⁰(ca. 1592-1624) was that Quetzalcóatl was the representative of iniquity controlled by forces of darkness and deception which caused a false manifestation pretending to preach the gospel (Lafaye 1974).

The use of the pre-Columbian past to authenticate a certain prestige for the Creole in New Spain was developed in the New Spain of the mid-eighteenth century when 'Creole explanations for patriotic historiography praised the Aztec past' (Morales-Moreno in 1994: 173-174). This historical discourse was reflected in the artistic representations of the culture and mythology of indigenous peoples of Mexico.

One famous account argues that the myth of Quetzalcóatl plays a prominent role in the history of the Spanish Conquest. The most well-known explanation of Cortés's victory in Mexico is the idea that

⁵⁰ Torquemada was a missionary and historian in Spanish colonial Mexico. His 1615 monumental history of the Indigenous was entitled *Los veinte y un libros rituales y Monarchia Indiana*, otherwise known as *Monarchia Indiana*.

Montezuma believed that the fair-skinned, bearded Spaniard was the returning God Quetzalcóatl and therefore held off his resistance.⁵¹ This account is recorded in Leon-Portilla's (1982) *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*. The rationale behind Montezuma's response is that Quetzalcóatl had vowed to return. Features of the costume Rivera has used to adorn Quetzalcóatl can be recognised in the following speech describing the gift which the Aztec emperor orders for Cortés:

There was also a collar of fine shells to cover the breast. This collar was adorned with the finest snail shells, which seemed to escape from the edges. And there is a mirror to be hung in back, a set of little gold bells and a pair of white sandals. [...] There was also a golden shield pierced in the middle with quetzal feathers around the rim and a pendant of the same feathers, the crooked staff of Ehecatl with a cluster of white stones at the crook. (Leon-Portilla 1992b: 24)

The awareness of various cultural paradigms evidently did not widely exist during the fifteenth century. It is important to note that the concept of mythology, as it is known to modern Western society, was not known at the time of the Conquest of Mexico; there was either 'truth' or falsehood and that which was not 'legitimately' related to the conception of God was profane. Belief in the influence of the stars on

⁵¹ It has been noted how this interpretation is possibly an indigenous ex-post facto rationalisation of defeat (Hassig 2001).

man was part of the religious paradigm of this period, so the presence of astral cosmology was not a cultural anomaly. The relationship of Quetzalcóatl to the religious and social prestige of the orthodox 'truth' was a pressing ecclesiastical post-conquest debate (Lafaye 1974).

Wolfe explains that the reception and cultural employment of the 'myth' of Quetzalcóatl is as complex as its many variations:

Like all the figures in the Mexican pantheon, Quetzalcoatl is an extremely complicated, many-sided figure, subject to innumerable and often contradictory traditions of different ages and regions, superimposed upon each other like the successive layers of his own pyramid-temples. (Wolfe 1937: 65)

Carrasco highlights some more of the diverse interpretations and socio-cultural deployment of the myth:

The diffusionists saw Quetzalcoatl's point of origin outside America, moving across the ancient landscape to Mexico. The symbolists located Quetzalcoatl's origin either in the rhythms of the sky or the depth of the human spirit. This original inspiration moves brilliantly through the celestial and terrestrial landscapes or through the spiritual universes of human beings in quest of liberation. (Carrasco 1982: 62)

Carrasco goes on to describe the historicist version of the myth in Western terms: 'Quetzalcoatl [...] moves gallantly in the drama of social development and change before being swept up into an imaginary flight along the arc of the morning star' (Carrasco 1982: 62). In Mesoamerican culture, Quetzalcóatl's transmutation into astral form as the morning star was not 'an imaginary flight' but part of a cosmological belief system. It is well documented in Mesoamerican literature that one of Quetzalcóatl's manifestations was Venus, the morning star, which appears in the east. Rodríguez describes how, in the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán*, Quetzalcóatl was 'metamorphosed into Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, or the lord of the house of dawn, the star which appears near the sun at sunrise' (1969: 246). Carrasco concludes that the meaning of Quetzalcóatl remains largely a mystery to the modern Western consciousness: 'As we turn to the present interpretation, it is clear that the full meaning of the mesmerizing design and figure eludes us still' (1982: 62).

Rivera combines various related elements which in reality are separated geographically and temporally, making up the history of Quetzalcóatl in the same compositional frame. As Wolfe points out, Rivera selected Quetzalcóatl from a number of possibilities: '[t]o Rivera, he seems to be the most attractive of the pre-conquest deities (no doubt in his capacity as civilizer and creator of the arts and crafts)' (Wolfe 1937: 65).

Rivera's choice of Quetzalcóatl as the Mesoamerican deity to exemplify Prehispanic Mexico may be due to certain experiences of Mesoamerican philosophy he experienced as part of his membership of

la Gran Logia Quetzalcóatl. This membership casts another perspective on Rivera's understanding of Aztec cosmology and Quetzalcóatl.

Rivera and *la Logia de Quetzalcóatl*

In his early years of return to Mexico from Europe, Rivera blended an interest in many dimensions of Aztec culture, including cosmography, with his Marxist beliefs. Wolfe describes some of Rivera's unpublished fragments from the early 1920s as 'a declaration of faith' which 'give fresh insight into those colorful and splendid scenes of the battles of the Aztec Knights of the Eagle and the Tiger with the Spanish *conquistadores*' (1939:164). In *Diego Rivera, Arte y Política* (1979), Tibol elaborates on this interest in Aztec cosmography, noting that Rivera's membership of a Rosicrucian order was recorded in Communist Party documents. Itzel Rodríguez Mortellaro also describes Diego Rivera's pursuit of esoteric knowledge and his involvement with 'la sociedad secreta Rosa Cruz [...] la Gran Logia Quetzalcóatl' and that '[s]egún un testimonio tardío del propio artista, hacia mediados de la década de los veinte mantuvo activo contacto con doctrinas y prácticas esotéricas' (Rodríguez Mortellaro 1997: 63).⁵²

The photograph (fig 4. 3) shows Rivera in the main ritual body of the *Gran Logia Anáhuac* in November 1924 (1994: 7). Rivera had painted a little known picture for the Lodge entitled *The Plumed Serpent* (*La Serpiente Emplumada*) (fig. 4.4). La Comité de Historiadores de la Logia Quetzalcóatl explain that:

⁵² 'Para esta interpretación partí del texto de Fausto Ramírez, "Lectura en clave masónica de las grasillas del primer piso del Patio de Trabajo", en *Los murales de la SEP, 1924-1932*. México, UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1997' (Rodríguez Mortellaro 1997: 57).

Existían desde principios de siglo, organizaciones que se dedicaban a la investigación y a la búsqueda de la comprensión de los fenómenos metafísicos, tales como la Hermandad Hermética de México, la Sociedad Kukulcán de Estudios y la Sociedad Filomática de México, encauzada a estudios filosóficos y filantrópicos. Esta última fue la que adoptó la filosofía esotérica Rosacruz. (1994: 2)

The journal of the American Rosicrucian society describes a ritual involving the sacred elements of water and fire which results in the liberation of the soul of the participant: 'Su alma se liberará de la Rueda de la Vida para unirse por la eternidad a los iluminados' (Lewis 1994: 10). The symbolism of water and fire can be seen as a repeated motif in the Central Panel. Rivera also uses the symbol of the Teocalli with the Aztec flag of water and fire as the central focal point of the entire mural. This symbolism links the Teocalli and flags, depicted in the Central Panel, to Quetzalcóatl and the cosmological perceptions of the Logia de Quetzalcóatl. Rivera's depiction of the transformation of Quetzalcóatl involves him rising from the flames and his metamorphosis from man through snake to plumed serpent:

[...] when he was dressed of his own accord, he burned himself, he gave himself to the fire[...] after he had become ash the quetzal bird's heart rose up; it could be seen and was known to enter the sky. The old men would say he had become Venus; and it was told that when the star appeared

Quetzalcoatl died. From now on he was called the Lord of Dawn. (The *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* quoted in Gilbert and Cottrell 1995: 204)

The astral cosmology implicit in the imagery of fire is significant here. The fire motif is scattered in a carefully designed fashion across the whole triptych *History of the Mexican People*. The symbolism of fire is universally powerful and is a distinctive example of the complexity of a symbol the meaning of which is filtered through differing cultural contexts. In zone 6, the fire roaring from the volcano has connotations in Mesoamerican cosmography of the 'sacred energy of the celestial fire that informed the Nahua and even the Mesoamerican conception of power, of which the man-god appeared to represent the final term: he became divine' (Gruzinski 1989: 22). Gruzinski asserts that the man-gods of Mexico including Quetzalcóatl completed a set path which was believed to be fixed in the divine world. 'It was standard, for example for the outcome to take the form of suicide or ritual death: Huemac, Lord of Tula, hanged himself in a cave: Quetzalcoatl organised his own sacrifice; Nezahualpilli, one of the last lords of Texcoco, predicted his own retirement and then disappeared' (Gruzinski 1989: 23).

Wolfe notes how Rivera was in the 'process of rediscovery of the plastic heritage of his people' and 'began to idealize everything Aztec: daily life, ritual, cosmogony, the way of waging war' (1939: 164). The artist describes the most controversial of subjects, the Aztec sacrifice. The sacrificial victim is described by the artist a warrior having a:

[...] heart like a splendid bleeding flower [which] was offered to the Father Sun, irradiating centre of all possibility of life. Or to the magnificent and beautiful Huitzilopochtli; him of the beak and wings of a bird, him whom in the Flowery War gave men the possibility of being more beautiful than tigers or eagles. (Rivera quoted in Wolfe 1939: 162-163)

Rivera utilises solar symbolism in both the Left and Right Panels. He employs the symbols of the dawn star and the sun which is either rising or setting behind scenes of Marx on the Left Panel and Quetzalcóatl on the Right. Wolfe talks of Rivera's particular approach to communism which links Aztec astral and religious symbolism, of the sun and sacred war of the flowers, to Marxism, quoting some further fragments from these texts which remain unpublished by Rivera:

But now there begins to dawn a hope in the eyes of the children, and the very young have discovered on the slate of the Mexican sky a great star which shines red and is five pointed [...] And emissaries have come saying that it is a presage of the birth of a new order and a new law without false priests who enrich themselves, without greedy rich who make the people die though they might easily, on what they produce with their hands, live in love and loving the Sun and the flowers again, on condition of bringing the news to all their brothers in misery on the American

continent, even though for that a new *Flowery War* might be needed. (Wolfe 1939: 165)

Wolfe was somewhat perplexed by this blending of cosmology and Marxism which linked the Prehispanic past with a socialist future. He exclaimed: 'Such was Diego Rivera's approach to Communism!' (Wolfe 1939: 165). Similarly, Jean Charlot exclaims 'sober Marxists could well have raised an eyebrow' (1963: 138) but connects this to 'his Parisian quest for a fourth dimension' (Charlot 1963:144-5). Rivera's arcane beliefs linked to ancient Aztec religion, did not deter him from political action. Wolfe follows his expression of bewilderment by noting the fact that the artist was politically ambitious, and towards 'the end of 1922 Diego joined the Communist Party of Mexico [and nearly] immediately he became leader within it' (1939: 166). His involvement with esoteric practices evidently did not detract from his political effectiveness.

Zone 7: The Arts

In zone 7, assemblages of figures to the right of the scene which depicts Quetzalcóatl, wear robes tied at the shoulder and made with a cloth of checked design (fig. 4.5). They dance with flowered and feathered staffs, before fertile cornfields. The dancers move to the rhythm of a vertical drum and a horizontal, barrel-shaped instrument which are being played with concentrated effort. The whole scene of music and dance is imbued with a percussive vitality due to the active posing of figures and their limbs in movement. Bare feet are in direct contact with the earth and heads merge with the skyline or cornfield, indicating direct and harmonious contact with nature. Behind the

raised knees of the dancers, we can see the serrated leaves of vegetation. A similar plant is held in the left hand of a dancer. In the same vicinity there are also cacti and tall plants with flowering heads.

Just below the dancers, a group of small collectives involved in artistic creation represent an enclave of communal harmony. Many of the figures in the scenes of crafts and culture depicted in zone 6 are naked except for loin cloths. Below the ritual drummers, a young woman weaves on a kind of back-strap loom which gives the illusion of being attached by a rope to the building of the National Palace itself. Another woman kneels behind and looks over the weaving. Several clusters of people show different artistic media such as paintings, codices, sculpture, tortillas and pottery being practised in a tranquil vision of synchronised production. The torsos of these figures are either draped with white capes covering their shoulders and tied at the chest or wearing simple white tunics. All these figures are turned inward, intimately preoccupied with their tasks and contained within the pictorial boundaries. This involved concentration connects the different creators of tasks, as the operators of a dynamic and effective system where each artisan has their place and social function.

An upright man wearing only a loin cloth is observed by a group of men some of whom hold sculpture mallets. His right hand forms a raised fist and his left hand displays an open palm gesturing to a man carving a slab. This standing figure is in dialogue with a sculptor whose arm and a slab of stone forms the furthest right point of this triangular composition bordering zones 7 and 8. Inquisitive and contented expressions are portrayed on the faces of this seated cluster of men who are elliptically represented. The foremost of these

crouched figures wears a cloth covering his torso as another standing observer wears a similar white cloth tied at the neck. The standing figures in this group have their hair scraped above their heads in an abruptly cut style tied with a red band. These figures are on the borderlands between the two zones, as they are at once interacting in artistic activity and observing the practice of warfare.

Calmecac, Art, Ritual and Religion

The Mesoamerican poem below from the Codex Matritensis indicates the religious importance of the arts in Prehispanic societies:

The Artist

The artist: disciple, abundant, multiple, restless.

The true artist, capable, practicing, skilful

Maintains a dialogue with his heart, meets things with his mind.

The true artist draws out all from his heart;

works with delight; makes things with calm and sagacity;

works like a true Toltec; composes his objects; works dexterously;

invents;

arranges materials; adorns them; makes them adjust.

The carrion artist works at random; sneers at the people;

makes things opaque; brushes across the surface of the face of things;

works without care; defrauds people; is a thief.

(*Codex Matritensis* in Léon-Portilla 1980: 208)

The distinctive costume and coiffure of these dancing figures can be recognised in sources available for Rivera's consultation. The scene depicted in the *Codex Florentino* (fig. 4.6), corresponds closely to Rivera's vignette in zone 7. The ceremonial objects, capes tied at the shoulder and the drum and another percussion instrument, the *teponaztli*, are similar in design and position to those in the codex.

The playing of musical instruments had religious significance and was an important vehicle for the transmission of cultural values:

[...] During this sign [One Flower], the nobles would dance out of piety [...] The lord ordered the one called Cuextecayotl ... or the one called Anaoacaiutl to recite the chant [...] They divided the emblems and feather ornaments among the nobles the courageous men and the soldiers [...] They also gave capes and loincloths to the singers, to those who played the *teponaztli* and the drums, to those who whistled and to all the other singers and dancers. (*Codex Florentino* in Gruzinski 1992: 130)

Gruzinski also notes how '[r]ank is indicated by garments, hairstyle and jewellery (for example special singers of hymns could wear a labret, or lip plug)' (*Codex Florentino* in Gruzinski 1992: 130).

Another recognisable vignette can be seen in the *Codex Mendoza* (fig. 4.7): the drum instrument is illustrated again and shows Rivera's attention to detail since in zone 7, he includes the horizontal blue band on the drum, and the costume and hairstyle of the player. The similarity of certain ceremonial objects such as the feathered stick is

also notable. There were many interpretations of Mesoamerican culture by Spanish scribes, as Ross states the native informants often did not agree as to the meaning of the pictographs (1978: 112). One interpretation is that the image of the drummer shows a father educating his son to follow his example as one who has risen in the world due to his own industry. The musicians are described in the commentary as playing the important function in the ritual at feasts and weddings. The three speech scrolls suggest singing (Ross 1978: 112), but it is notable that Rivera chooses not to represent the voice in this way.

Rivera would certainly have had access to these instruments that he illustrated in *Prehispanic Mexico*. The National Museum in Mexico City displayed five kinds of pre-Hispanic musical instruments at this time. As the Guide to a History of Mexico, (Alonso Teja Zabre 1935), explains these included ‘the *huehuetl* (a kind of drum), the *Teponaztli* (a kind of xylophone), the *ayacachtli* resembled a rattle used by Indian dancers [to...] this day, a gourd with small stones inside. The *huehuetl* was a hollow cylinder, set up on end, cut away in zig-zag form at the bottom, and closed at the top by a tightly stretched skin so as to produce a drum-like sound when struck with the palms of the hands’ (Teja Zabre 1935: 92). The guide also observes that: ‘Dancing was one of the ways of paying homage to their gods, and also spiritual and physical enjoyment, as evidence of good health and joyousness’ (Teja Zabre 1935: 93). Rivera’s image could apply to a number of different religious ceremonies in which dancing was a ritual element. The religious duty of dance was seen as a serious and necessary activity which ‘was compulsory for young people [...] Dress suited the songs sung.

Dancing and singing took place in honour of the deity to whom the feast was dedicated so the participants donned different kinds of cloaks, plumes, head-dresses and masks' (Teja Zabre 1935: 93).

The central depiction of Quetzalcoatl in *Prehispanic Mexico* suggests that the dance ritual is likely to be associated with this deity. The feast of the plumed serpent was a vital festival in the Aztec religious calendar and '[w]hen the feast of Quetzalcoatl came round, merchants resorted to the temple, and comedies, dances and other forms of rejoicing went on in the great courtyard' (Teja Zabre 1935: 93).

Davies records that the instruments used in prehispanic cultures also exercised a religious purpose and this was integral to sacred song and dance. This ritual sustained traditional culture annually and the Ancient festival was primarily crucial in the Aztec capital:

[...] nowhere was it observed with more pomp and pageantry than in Tenochtitlan. [...] Celebrations involved the chanting of sacred songs, accompanied by music in which drums and shell trumpets pre-dominated, together with dancing and endless processions. (Davies 1982: 228)

Music, dance and song are part of the Mesoamerican heritage which has consistently sustained its vitality and survived to a degree against other forms of cultural colonialism:

The pre-Columbian spirit and oral legacy undoubtedly aided the Indian to survive into our times. And he has survived against the most crushing and overwhelming odds. Through

the centuries the Ancient World and the lyric songs have given heart and courage to the individual as they did 500 years ago. (Horcasitas 1980: xvii)

The male figures in Rivera's scene of artistic activity (fig. 4.5) are likely to be undergoing a form of religious education. The *calmecac* was one of the main educational institutions in Aztec society and gave instruction in 'priestly and other administrative duties' (Ross 1978: 84).⁵³ Young men who underwent an education in 'the *calmecac* were taught to read and interpret the codices and calendars; they also studied the tribe's history and traditions, and memorized the sacred hymns and other texts' (Léon-Portilla 1992b: xliv-xlv). This precise mental recording and recitation was the reason that the burning of Mesoamerican libraries, by the conquistadors, did not destroy many aspects of oral and written culture. The male figures sculpting on the border between zone 7 and 8 also have the elongated foreheads given to nobles and aristocrats by tying boards to their heads when young. This practice was widespread in Mesoamerica.

As well as portraying these human scenes accurately, Rivera also depicts native vegetation in a similar way to the post-Conquest sources. Fig. 4.8 shows an illustration from the *Codex Florentino* and text illustrating similar plants with splayed leaves to those depicted behind the dancers in *Prehispanic Mexico*. A comparison with Rivera's scene (fig. 4.9) indicates that he has selected the same stylised, vegetation to illustrate the background to the rituals depicted on the

⁵³ The *cuicacalli* was the other one the two institutions occupying the closing years of Aztec male adolescence and this will be discussed in relation to zone 7.

Right Panel. Such details as this suggest that Rivera did, in some respects, attempt to create authentic historical detail.

Rivera's depiction of native vegetation is significant as plants and plant medicine played an important role in indigenous civilisations. The cultural, religious and medicinal significance of plants in indigenous culture is a theme he develops later in Mexico City in his mural at the *Hospital de la Raza*, entitled *The History of Medicine in Mexico: The People's Demand for Better Health* (1953). In the hospital mural Rivera depicts eighty-four varieties of medicinal plants along with their Nahuatl names used in indigenous cultures. The agave or maguey cactus plant (yaquious maguey; a member of the lily family) is one of Mexico's most important plants and is utilised for a multitude of purposes including the use of the spikes for needles and fibres for clothing worn by common people who were strictly forbidden to wear cotton. The juice from the maguey cactus was fermented to make pulque, which is still drunk in Mexico today, but in pre-Columbian times was a sacred drink used for ritual intoxication by priests. Pulque drinking was permitted more indiscriminately but 'only among men and women of over fifty years of age' (Davies 1982:214). Severe penalties were the consequences of for those who used the drink for more pedestrian purposes:

Pulque was regarded as a sacred potion, only to be drunk on ceremonial occasions; a noble who had become intoxicated for his own pleasure was to be secretly strangled; for the commoner the law was different; first the offender would be publicly disgraced and have his head shaved; if he

drank again, he was to be beaten to death or strangled in the presence of all the youths in the ward where he lived.

(Davies 1982: 240-241)

In the section of zone 7 depicting artistic production Rivera has also included many details of everyday pre-Columbian life. For example, the *metlatl* (grinding stone) used to crush the corn for tortillas. We see the back of a man who stands intently sculpting a piece of stone and a girl weaving. The source of Rivera's vignette is likely to be the *Codex Mendoza*, which shows similar images depicting the instruction of young women in Aztec society. The type of weaving shown in zone 7 can still be seen in indigenous cultures in Mexico today is an example of the endurance of some aspects of prehispanic culture.

Zone 8: Ordered Conflict

[...] within the official religion of the Aztecs, beliefs and rituals had been reshaped in terms of their mystic-militaristic world view, in sharp contrast with which a truly spiritualistic wisdom had also developed. (Léon-Portilla 1980: 27)

As Léon-Portilla explains, the militaristic dimension of Aztec culture was highly significant and developed alongside a spiritual knowledge which contained sophisticated understanding. In zone 8 (fig. 4.10), Rivera depicts a military scene alongside the artistic and

spiritual cameos in zones 6 and 7. In zone 8, the theme of battle and conflict is compounded and choreographed in a way which resembles a ritual due to its ordered arrangement. This contrasts with the intense brutality, violence and struggle of the battle scenes depicted in the Central and Left Panels which are more severe and chaotic. The orientation of three elegantly poised, dead bodies at the feet of the crowd forms part of this sense of ritual. The cadavers are scattered systematically as if their graceful death were destined as the result of some necessary order. The assailants are grouped into a triangular unit defined by the spears of the bare-backed warriors and the backs of their opponents dressed in animal skins. The group is compressed and contained, although not isolated from the serenity of the pyramid scene above them; the conflict is neatly compacted in the left corner of the wall frame. This positioning makes the point of the existence of clashing warriors whilst simultaneously relating it to the tranquil social organisation depicted above. The minimal, white clothing and predominantly dark skins as well as the richness in tone of the animal warriors cause this unit of figures to recede, despite their significant placing at the front corner of the composition. Thus the foregrounded assemblage of the battle scene does not impose on the cultural scenes of zone 6 which are illuminated by the predominance of more concealing white costumes. The cluster of gracefully poised warriors is contained as they look up to a leader, who is depicted as if directing from the rear and is holding a yellow shield patterned with black squares.

In zone 8 the composition of weapons in a finely-calibrated, rhythmic pattern is made up of three intersecting poles on the right

which form a precise triangle. This device creates a structural framework which orders and contains the fight scene. The resultant triangular shape echoes the lines of the pyramid above and repeated bodies carrying backpacks.

Telpchacalli, Warfare, Sacrifice and Tribute

The *Codex Mendoza*, as mentioned in Rivera's sources at the beginning of this chapter, describes the *tequihua* (valiant warriors) who educate the young Aztec noble. They "exercise him in the military arts and take him to war" (quoted in Ross 1978: 89). The group depicted in the Right Panel are shown undertaking the *cuicacalli* or *telpchacalli*, which was a general education with emphasis on the martial arts but also covering the basics of religion and ethics. Rivera's assembly is tranquil and ordered, although, in reality '[t]here was much animosity and rivalry between the pupils of different schools who would sometimes attack and loot each others premises' (Ross 1978: 84). Léon-Portilla explains the complex social distribution of the *telpochcalli* within Tenochtitlan:

Almost every sector or clan in Tenochtitlan had its own *telpochcalli*, dedicated to the war god Tezcatlipoca. This form of Aztec education was based on gender and social class nevertheless '[f]or over a hundred years before the Conquest, education in Tenochtitlan was compulsory for all male children. (Léon-Portilla 1992b: x1iv)

Another highly significant aspect of Aztec society is illustrated in zone 8: Rivera portrays older Aztec warriors who are involved in the

collection of tribute. The warrior with a plumed headdress can clearly be recognised as quauhtin or Eagle Knight as we can see in fig. 4.11, from the Codex Mendoza. These flamboyantly dressed figures with bright costumes and circular, patterned and feather-bordered shields can also be recognised as Aztec warriors. The *Codex Mendoza* explains that increasingly ostentatious dress was accorded to a warrior according to his military aptitude (Ross 1978: 98). The Eagle and Jaguar knights belonged to high military ranks. The weapons Rivera displays are significant within Aztec military history:

The most important offensive weapon of the Aztecs was the macana, a sort of paddle-shaped wooden club edged with sharp bits of obsidian. [...] Other widely used arms were the atlatl, or spear thrower, bows and arrows of different sizes, blowguns and a variety of spears and lances, most of them with obsidian points. The defensive weapons were shields made of wood or woven fibers—often elaborately painted or adorned with feathers—and quilted cotton armor. (Léon-Portilla 1992b: xliv)

The blazing fire at the foot of the temple in zone 8 is linked to the fighting group through the similarly-coloured orange plumes of the uppermost warrior. The flames are integral to the battle cluster and mingle with the assailants, their symbolic potency permeating the scene with an atmosphere of simultaneous, natural devastation and renewal. As the warriors are in training for religious wars, the building under which they fight was designed around sacred geometry.

Mesoamerican architecture was built to precision in terms of alignment with astrological phenomena and followed distinctive methods of construction based on religious cosmological premises. Calleman explains this archaeological precision, with reference to the Pyramid of Kukulcan in Chichén Itzá, amongst other important archaeological sites:

Each of the Eight Underworlds of Mesoamerican mythology is a different “creation” generated by a cycle twenty times shorter than the one it was built on. That is why the most important of the Mayan pyramids—the Temple of the Inscriptions in Palenque, the Pyramid of the Jaguar in Tikal, and the Pyramid of Kukulcan in Chichén Itzá—were all built as hierarchical structures with eight levels. (2004: 90)

In *Prehispanic Mexico* scenes which would be realistically incongruent are juxtaposed and given an illusory continuity through visual merging. The complex and detailed reality of Mesoamerican pyramids is not represented in Rivera’s depiction. As I discuss in section two of this chapter, the representation of this simplified image of the pyramid has many similarities with the reductionism implicit in post-revolutionary museum culture. An illusory unity is achieved by putting together the diverse themes of battle, sacrifice and religious culture. This accentuates the image of a dynamic and ordered society operating with the exactitude and regularity of ritual. The scene appears staged, complete with costumes and choreographed movement. The climbing men are systematically patterned and their

postures are poised, controlled and balanced. The illusion is one of rhythmic, systematic action and movement, one which involves the viewer who initially mirrors the tribute carriers who climb the temple as the viewer climbs the stairs. The burden they are carrying is likely to be tribute transported to the impressively-clad figure at the pinnacle of a tall pyramidal rise. The flamboyant character at the top of the climb is dressed in a similar white feathered costume to the collapsed warrior in the lowest left-hand corner of zone 8. The upright figure wears an animal-headdress which is raised high above his back and a snake-headed crooked staff while the prone figure wears an animal mask. Behind his majestic form is a pile of corn or maize which holds religious significance in Aztec culture, and which will be discussed later in this section.

Another towering body stands directly behind him and to the left; he wears a green, feathered-headdress and a colourful, circular shield with a feathered fringe. This shield resembles those of the warriors below, who also hold similar blue weapons to this man. A third figure at the top of the pyramid wears a two-tone patterned cape and crouches above a large statue which is carved with a human face. The warrior's full battle dress with plumed shields is identical to those depicted in the *Codex Mendoza*. Ross (1978) states that they are the costumes of captains in the Mexican army (see fig. 4.11).

Moving further clockwise in zone 8 at the edge of zones 7 and 8 above the tribute-carriers, we see the use of visual abbreviation as half-concealed hands and female heads carry circular baskets behind the pyramid climbers. The viewer is left to imagine the rest of their outline and where their destination might be. The regular spacing of

these figures suggests a considered and definite destination. Above these busy groups three men stand, at the base of another pyramid which contains central steps and is edged with a deep red band. At first these figures look like a many-armed Shiva but on more careful inspection the viewer can see the dignified forms standing closely together with their merged arms poised in a similar open-palmed gesture. The men are all clothed only in loin cloths and their partial-nakedness accentuates the vulnerability and openness indicated by their upturned palms. The blood flowing down the pyramid above indicates that these men are captives of war who are awaiting ritual sacrifice. The religious motivations of Aztec warfare caused them to collect such sacrificial offerings to the gods as well as tribute such as maize and salt. Two of these men as well as Quetzalcóatl are the only three, of the fifty or so depicted, who look intently out of the pictorial space.

The deity's light skin and beard sets him apart from the other bodies as does his square pose, ritual costume and mesmerising stare. The stasis of these prominent figures, who meet the gaze of the viewer on the balcony as well as the settled nature of the seated groups, slows down the pace of any movement suggested in the scene. This further adds to the impression of the battle scene as a controlled, ceremonial conflict.

The most prominently placed warrior on the top of the pyramid wears a white Aztec overhead standard, which can also be found in the *Codex Mendoza* (fig. 4.12). These standards were made on a frame and supported by poles attached to the backs of 'Indian' warriors of higher ranks. These were most often effigies and symbols of gods with which

the warrior was associated and whose power he may have wished to evoke in battle. Such effigies were often frightening in aspect in order to overawe their adversaries (Catlin 1978: 203). Novices are seen carrying loads held by *mecapalli* (rush head straps) as modest and gruelling tasks were part of their training, as can be found depicted elsewhere in the *Codex Mendoza*.

Rivera's depiction of baskets of tribute in *Prehispanic Mexico* does not detail any produce apart from maize, which is piled at the top of the pyramid. Boone's interpretation of part one of the *Codex Mendoza* links the victory chronicle of the expanding central authority of Tenochtitlan to the pattern of tribute payments. He lists extensively the tribute payments of scores of towns and cities to the capital from the tribute sections of the *Codex Mendoza*, these include:

[...] large quantities of cacao, *piñol*, mantas and mantillas, warrior's costumes of over thirty styles, shields, feathers, bins of corn, *chia*, beans, and amaranth, plus gourd bowls, native paper, mats, bulrushes, seals, maguey syrup, limes, tunics, beans, plants of wood, firewood, loaves of salt, jars of honey, unrefined copal, strings of greenstones, copper axes, scallop shells, gold tablets, gourd bowls of gold dust, earthen pans of yellow varnish, masks of rich blue stones, loads of cane mouth perfumes, carrying frames, deerskins, quetzal feathers, red feathers, turquoise feathers, crystal and amber lip plugs, bird skins of specific color, jaguar skins, bales of cotton, live eagles, and many other objects in

various and often tremendous quantities. (Carrasco 1999: 42)

Rivera's meticulous portrayal of Mesoamerican life on the walls the right corridor does, however, contain such detail (fig. 4.24).

Rediscovering the Prehispanic Past

Painted in 1929-1930 while Rivera was working at Cuernavaca, "History and Perspective of Mexico" has become a visual cornerstone of the modern Mexican's patriotic consciousness. It represents both the grandeur of ancient Indian civilization and the social-revolutionary origin of the modern nation. (Catlin 1978: 214)

The above words by Catlin are describing the fact that the mural triptych *History of the Mexican People*; (which he calls by the name of *History and Perspective of Mexico* one of the many variations of its title), distinctly joins the idea of the origins of a social revolution to the indigenous past. The following sections of this chapter will consider *Prehispanic Mexico* with particular focus on of the theme of origins of the modern post-revolutionary nation, which are seen to be entwined with the roots of the prehispanic past. Once more Smith's theory of nationalist ethno-symbolism throws light upon understanding the National Palace Mural in the terms of a projected 'imagined community' in the process of nation building. The most obvious component of Smith's theory which is applicable to the Right Panel is 'A Myth of Temporal Origins, or When We Were Begotten' (Smith 1999: 63). In this component of ethnic myth '[o]ne of the main tasks of

nationalist historians is to date the community's origins, and so locate it in time in relation to other relevant communities' (Smith 1999: 63). Smith argues that within the cultural components of *ethnies*⁵⁴, the stress on cultural dimensions, in the widest sense, provides some flexibility within ethnic membership, 'which in normal circumstances allows for a degree of demographic replenishment and cultural borrowing and hence social and cultural adaptation' (1999: 15). As I have demonstrated in aesthetic and historical readings of the *Prehispanic Mexico*, Rivera himself borrowed extensively from Mesoamerican sources and copies in order to present the pre-Columbian past as the origins of the nation. The result of this bricolage had significant implications for the representation of indigenous peoples within nation-building discourses.

Rivera made genuine attempts at depicting an authentic vision of Prehispanic Mexico, based on real artefacts and codices. The artist's detailed faithfulness to the recreation of images from Mesoamerican codices adds to the credibility of the social myth created due to the resulting aura of authenticity. This thoughtful recording contributes to a shared cultural memory and reinforces a sense of legitimacy in the implicit nationalist ethnomythology, as Smith explains:

It is notoriously difficult to disentangle the elements of genuine shared memory from exaggeration, idealization and heroization which we associate with myth and legend, since

⁵⁴ According to Smith *ethnies* can be found in every epoch and continent and their defining features are: identification with a name or emblem; possession of a *myth* of common ancestry; sharing historical memories and traditions; the ownership of one or more elements of common culture; connection to the idea of a 'homeland' or historic territory and the display of a degree of solidarity, at least amongst its elite sectors (1999: 12-13).

there is usually more than a kernel of truth in the latter. But we can say that the more faithfully recorded, better documented and more comprehensive a golden age, the more impact it can exert over later generations and epochs of that community (or in some cases communities). (Smith 1999: 263)

As this thesis applies the theory of universal nationalist ethno-symbolism to the culturally specific context of post-revolutionary Mexico, I will initially outline the exact circumstances in which the Right Wall was created. Smith's theoretical understanding of the long process of development of national culture and the creation of a collective long-term memory will be applied with historical specificity to Mexican thought in the century leading up to the conception of the National Palace Mural. I will then move on to investigate the way that nationalist ethnomythology applies to the mural. I will demonstrate how nationalist ethnosymbolism in *Prehispanic Mexico* is also connected to the myth of ancestry and a 'golden age'. The image of the distant past which provides socio-cultural resources with which to replenish the collective memory of a newly bonded community contributes to the nationalist mythology of a 'golden age'. The scenes of religion, art, music, warfare, tribute and sacrifice he has selected for this composition contribute to the creation of an image of a halcyon era. As Smith argues:

For some it will be a golden age because it boasted religious virtuosos, saints and sages; for others because great art,

drama, music and philosophy flourished; for still others because the community enjoyed its greatest territorial extent and military power; or pioneered great moral and legal codes and institutions. (Smith 1999: 263)

Although the depiction of the entire wall is significant, I have selected specific motifs within the mural which have particularly strong symbolic value with regard to the 'Myth of Temporal Origins, or *When We Were Begotten*'. Following the historical contextualisation of this panel and Rivera's stance, in the remaining sections of this chapter, I will apply theoretical aspects of Smith's universal theory to these powerfully symbolic features of *Prehispanic Mexico*. I will examine various pictorial elements in relation to the historical, socio-cultural creation of nationalist ethno mythology and the creation of 'sacred origins' and a nostalgic 'golden age'. Firstly, I reflect on the symbol of consecrated land; mountains and volcanoes as 'special territory' in conjunction with sacred martyrs as exemplified by Quetzalcóatl in the Right Panel. This will be followed by an exploration of the use of the iconic Mexican pyramid as the archetypal representation of a complex yet mysterious Prehispanic civilisation. The symbolism of 'the sun' and the cross-cultural significance of this compelling solar iconography will be considered with regard to its function of linking the 'golden age' of the past with the 'golden age' depicted in 'the future' as envisioned in the Left Panel of the National Palace Mural. The final section synthesises Rivera's representation of the Prehispanic past and its links with the display and spectacle of the representation of indigenous objects in Mexican museum culture and with a modernised national state. This connection will serve to

illustrate the implicit relationship between the use of the pre-Columbian past and the projection of an image of an inclusive society, which values the whole spectrum of peoples under the banner of a liberating equality.

Muralists, *Mexicanidad* and Nationalism

A key component of this thesis is that Rivera was in part acting as a conduit for the socio-political forces of his time. Therefore, as stated earlier in the chapter, a comprehensive analysis of the work must consider the fact that the elements of nationalist ethomythology in the mural are simultaneously universal and culturally specific. This historical particularity of the representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico can be partially traced through Mexican post-revolutionary cultural history and Rivera's specific role in this context.

The year 1929 was an eventful time for Rivera who also began the murals entitled *Health, Purity, Knowledge and Symbols of Fruition* at the *Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia* and was commissioned by United States ambassador Dwight Morrow to paint the fresco, mentioned in Chapter Three, at the *Palacio de Cortés* in Cuernavaca. He was appointed director of the upper school at the San Carlos Academy and married Frida Kahlo for the first time. Rivera was playing a high-profile role in the Mexican political arena and President Portes Gil, who, as I stated in chapter three, commissioned the mural, offered to create a cabinet post for Rivera in this year (Rochfort 1993: 123). The artist was also involved in defending his friend and comrade, photographer Tina Modotti, who had been falsely accused of killing her lover, the Cuban political activist, Julio Antonio Mella (Rivera 1991).

At this time Rivera was part of a community of artists, as well as moving towards the apex of his career as an independent international artist. Rivera's ideas on indigenous aesthetics and cultural politics had been influenced by another member of the Syndicate of Technical Workers Painters and Sculptors, the Guatemalan artist Carlos Mérida. Rivera had been greatly impressed by this artist who was of Mayan origins and had studied in Paris where he also knew Picasso and Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920). Rivera disagreed with Vasconcelos's perception of Robert Montenegro as the initiator of the Mexican Mural Movement and in *El Demócrata*, March 2, 1924 applauds Mérida as the first pioneer 'to incorporate American picturesqueness into true painting, and none can remain unmoved by his grave and rich colour harmonies' (quoted in Charlot 1963: 72). Charlot described Mérida as '[e]ngrossed with Indian lore', saying that 'he transposed Mayan motifs into modern idiom on his return to America' (1963: 71). In an introduction to his one man show in 1920 at the Academia de Bellas Artes in Mexico City (fig. 4.13), Mérida wrote a manifesto which expounded the virtues of the indigenous past:

My painting is fired with an intimate conviction that it is imperative to produce a totally American art. I believe that America, possessed of such a glorious past, with both nature and race original in character, will doubtless breed a personal artistic expression. This is a task for the prophetic vision of the young artists of America. (in Charlot 1963: 71)

A review in *El Universal*, 27 August 1920, described the show as possessing an 'Indian atmosphere' and an 'indigenously rustic style' (Charlot 1963: 71). For a clearer understanding, it must be noted that the history of glorification of an indigenous past has its roots deeply entrenched in Mexican socio-cultural history. There was a resurgence of these themes in the cultural production created in the context of post-revolutionary nation building in Mexico.

The close connections between the artists of this period and the representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico can be detected. Echoes of Mérida's manifesto are noticeably detected in the famed *Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores de México* in *El Machete*. As I stated in Chapter One, the meaning and purpose of the mural movement was boldly outlined in this Manifesto. The pains of political resistance were described in the manifesto as endemic to the Mexican character fighting 'sin descanso' to bring a working-class victory, which was integrally bound to autochthonous culture, resulting in 'un florecimiento unánime de arte étnica, cosmogónica e historicamente transcendental en la vida de nuestra raza, comparable al de nuestras admirables civilizaciones autóctonas' (1989 [1923]: 323).

The idea of 'Mexicanness' or *Mexicanidad* was integral to the creation of the post-revolutionary national collective-consciousness. Rivera extols this facet of his identity in his life history, explaining the feelings of national belonging at the heart of his artistic identity. In 1928 the artist returned home from his visits to Moscow and Hamburg shortly before he began *Prehispanic Mexico* on the right wall of the National Palace in 1929. On his journey home, Rivera plainly

reiterates his nationalistic sentiments distinguishing himself from the Russian artists.

During this third sea voyage to my homeland, I became sure of my future artistic medium. I also spent time clarifying my impressions of my sojourn in Russia. I began to understand the opposition of the Soviet painters toward me as a working painter in their country. And that helped me understand better my place as a Mexican painter in mine.
(Rivera 1991: 95)

Rivera's assertion of his 'Mexicanness' was part of the wider nationalistic resurgence that was occurring within different dimensions of society. As well as the redefinition of the Mexican national 'community' during the years of post-revolutionary reconstruction, what it meant to be Mexican in artistic terms was also being redefined.

Smith argues that the acknowledgement of outsiders is integral to the projection of 'sacred ancestry': '[i]t is no wonder that dramatists and artists eagerly turned back to the legends of primeval origins', stating that the reason that 'nobody questioned the need to establish the antiquity and ancestry of the community' was because 'the demonstration was vital, both for self-esteem and security, and for external recognition' (Smith 1999: 63). Rivera overtly utilised Mexican heritage for increased 'external' recognition, as he stridently defended his national identity whilst in America to enhance his international credentials. He exclaimed that the original roots of all America were

those of Prehispanic Mexico. This assertion of ancestral superiority served to increase his cultural capital and raise his public profile. Craven records one of Rivera's 'persistent attacks in public on Eurocentrism' in America in 1931 as '[a]n exemplary summation of his position' (1997: 132). In an article entitled 'Myself, My Double, and my friend the Architect with brief interventions by the Shade of Renoir',⁵⁵ Rivera exclaimed:

Listen Americas! Your country is strewn over with impossible objects that are in no way beautiful, not even practical... Most of your houses are covered with copies of European ornament... Your antiques are not to be found in Rome. They are to be found in Mexico. (Rivera quoted in Craven 1997: 132)

This apparent wholesale redefinition of culture in the post-revolutionary period, actually, displayed elements of both change and continuity. The representation of indigenous peoples is integral to this paradoxical situation in which a series of historically-based images were presented as the basis of a new society. The continuous stereotypes of the native peoples of Mexico which emerged during the post-revolutionary period are clearly traceable back at least as far as Mexican independence in the 1820s. I will now trace the genealogy of Rivera's representation of *Prehispanic Mexico* as the ancestral homeland and sacred territory of the Mexican nation.

⁵⁵ The translation from Spanish cited in Craven, has connotations of the 'shadow' of Renoir.

The History of a Glorified Prehispanic Past

Doremus observes that ‘following independence, archetypes of the Indian were often employed to foster national identity and to create social and political cohesion’ (2001a: 56). In Chapter Three, I illustrated the clear similarities between nineteenth-century archetypes, and Rivera’s representations of the indigenous peoples of Mexico in the Central Panel. Doremus goes on to argue that a seemingly distinct change happened in the post-revolutionary period and that in:

[...] the wake of the Mexican Revolution these archetypes proliferated as artists and intellectuals aspired to construct a national identity based not on European culture, as had been the case during the Porfiriato, but rather on a uniquely Mexican one. (2001a: 56)

Doremus links this assertion of Mexicanness directly to the muralists and particularly to the ‘rediscovery’ of the Prehispanic past. She argues that ‘[a]uthentic “Mexicanness” was discovered in Mexico’s Aztec heritage and glorified in the work of many artists, most famously that of the Mexican muralists’ (2001a: 56). However, as I illustrated in Chapter Two, this assertion of a glorification of the Mesoamerican past cannot be applied to Orozco’s sardonic critiques of both contemporary and prehispanic indigenous societies and Siqueiros’s allegiances to a forward-looking, ‘civilising’ modernity. Although Rivera’s *indigenista* stance can be seen largely to typify the perspective which includes prehispanic origins, I argue that this strand of nationalist mythology

which glorified the 'Indian' past was part of an intellectual trajectory which had existed at least since Mexican Independence which drew from accounts of the Conquest. Natividad Gutiérrez observes that:

In Mexico, the use of the indigenous past can be traced to the eighteenth century, and its symbolism was an inspiration for the independence movement of 1810; and Mexican nationalists had at their disposal an abundance of ethnic material for the creation of myths and symbols.
(1999: 22)

As Benjamin explains, bifurcated hegemonic attitudes towards indigenous peoples had been reinforced during the nineteenth century, when '[t]he first national historians of the nineteenth century looked for the origins and nature of Mexico in the contrasting interpretations of the sixteenth-century conquerors, chroniclers, and missionaries' (2000: 15). He outlines the diametrically opposed factions with their different perceptions of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, which were reinforced in the post-Independence years. The 'traditionalist hispanophile conservatives were influenced by the original imperial school of history', and this was informed by, for example, Hernán Cortés, letters to Emperor Charles V, and the chronicles of Bernal Díaz de Castillo and 'other texts which justified and glorified military conquest of the Aztec empire' (Benjamin 2000: 15). In general they denigrated native culture, and categorized it as 'brutal and savage', they condemned its supposedly 'idolatrous and "satanic" nature'.

Nineteenth-century conservatives accordingly interpreted the conquest as the birth of the Mexican nation, Cortés as its founding father, and the apparition of the Virgin Mary, as the Virgin of Guadalupe (only ten years following the conquest), as its christening. (Benjamin 2000: 15)

Benjamin goes on to describe the opposing division of '[r]ationalist hispanophobe liberals [who] imagined a very different Mexico, one that was from very different and more complicated traditions' (Benjamin 2000: 15-16). This intellectual convention surrounding indigenous heritage went through various changes, the point of origin being a nation which was 'the new Jerusalem in Anahuac, [which] was awakened to freedom by Father Miguel Hidalgo's *Grito de Dolores*, (Benjamin 2000: 16). Like Rivera's *Prehispanic Mexico*, followers of this strand of patriotic thinking drew on, writings of Franciscan ethnologies, for example that of Bernardo de Sahagún. They also later employed Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and Francisco Xavier Clavijero to create an 'appreciation, even glorification, of the ancient Mexicans' (Benjamin 2000: 16). National historical writing began in the early nineteenth-century, when historians such as Fray José Servando Teresa de Mier and Carlos María Bustamente, exalted the last Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc and Insurgency leaders Hidalgo and Morelos which provided the 'infant country [with] the prepackaged heritage found in Creole patriotism' (Benjamin 2000: 16). It has been argued that the roots of *indigenismo* stretched as far as the desire of certain post-Colonial *criollos* (creoles), who used the idea of a pre-Conquest evangelisation of Mexico by St. Thomas-Quetzalcóatl, to

assert racial prestige over the mainland Spaniards disparagingly referred to as *gachupines* (Lafaye 1974).

An awareness of this continuity in the dominant intellectual paradigm, illustrated by Benjamin and Lomnitz, is demonstrated by Raquel Tibol when she observes that: '[l]e muralisme ne surgit pas brusquement au Mexique après le triomphe de la révolution mexicaine qui éclate en Novembre 1910' (1993: 174). And yet the fact that the muralists are often described as having created a social and cultural 'renaissance' suggests that they presented a new vision for the Mexican people. Jean Charlot, one of the key post-revolutionary artists, proposes that this 'rebirth' was one in which the indigenous played a key role: 'As befitted a movement born of a revolution, the mural renaissance leaned lovingly on Indianism' (1963: 1). However, the following section will show that the strong element of indigenous representation, integral to the vision of both the revolution and the muralists, did not emerge spontaneously from a new post-revolutionary ethos, as the term Mexican 'mural renaissance' implies, but displayed elements of Mexican racial thought which are historically contingent. This kind of historical continuity is captured by Smith's point 'that nations are historical phenomena'. What appears to be altogether new, may in reality contain elements of both continuity rooted in the past as well as change due to contemporary circumstances.

A 'Pure' Race

Wolfe describes Rivera's motivation behind the painting of *Prehispanic Mexico* in lyrical terms: '[a]ll the poetry and fresh dew of

morning that seemed to him to surround that dawn of civilization before the Spanish conqueror came would go on the right-hand wall' (Wolfe 1939: 295). This idealistic metaphor of purity has strong resonances with the idea of a 'chosen people' at the 'dawn' or origin of civilisation, a 'pure' race which bonds the new national community through distant filial ties and attachment to a sacred homeland.

The artist himself had expressed explicitly political objectives behind his work and explained that every 'personage in the mural was dialectically connected with his neighbours, in accordance with his role in history' (Rivera 1991: 101). Alma Reed connects this dialectic specifically to the representation of native peoples of Mexico. She argues that in the National Palace Mural 'he presented an interpretation of Mexican history from the standpoint of the conflict of two opposing forces—the oppressed and the oppressors. In a general way the indigenous race represented the former, and the Spanish conquerors and foreign elements the latter (Reed 1960: 83). Rivera also described the fact that all the aspects of the mural are inextricably interlinked: 'Nothing was solitary; nothing was irrelevant', and that 'all its details are organically related' (1991: 101).

The most evident of these interrelationships, and concomitant clashes, between the European and the indigenous peoples of Mexico is the depiction of time frames. If read from right to left the viewer experiences the spatial chronology of the mural in the order of distant past, more recent past, present and future. The chronological narrative of the mural begins with *Prehispanic Mexico*. Craven describes it as 'the first of the three walls to be executed and both the earliest in historical time and the last in terms of Western

chronological placement' (1997: 114). This means that Rivera's placing of the order of history is non-chronological in terms of the path of the observer. As the spectator ascends up the stairs the time order of scenes is experienced in a non-chronological order. In terms of historical narrative, however, the chronological ordering of events posits the Right Panel and depiction of Prehispanic Mexico as the origin of the Mexican nation.

Fixed points in time act as a barrier to the flood of meaninglessness; they are essential gauges of collective development; and they place the 'generations of our ancestors' in a definite linear succession stretching back to the sacred moment of birth. (Debray 1977 in Smith 1999: 63)

The presentation of three separate time frames exhibited in the three panels actually results in a linear departure from this point of origin. There are three points of departure in the three separate sections. Namely, from right to left: Prehispanic Mexico, the Conquest opening the Central Panel, and post-revolutionary decay which begins the narrative of Left Wall. The result of these various co-existing time origins, is that time frames are at once linear and superimposed upon each other, both ordering and linking them in the mind of the viewer. Mesoamerican origins, struggle and conflict and post-revolutionary change are connected as multiple pasts, present and future.

Mountainous Mexico as Special Territory

The idea of sacred land walked upon by blessed forefathers plays a leading role in the creation of the 'myth of origins'. The symbolic presence of mountains and volcanoes is integral to the myth of ancestry depicted in *Prehispanic Mexico*. The transcendent eagle-serpent emerges from the mouth of a fiery volcano, surrounded by mountains, the contours of which are echoed by pyramids merging into the landscape. As Wolfe observes:

[Quetzalcóatl] appears in the great pre-conquest mural on the right wall of the National Palace stairway, not once but three times: at his birth, issuing forth in his most familiar form as feathered serpent from the flames of a fiery volcano; as a priest-king-teacher while he lived among men; and, defeated, as he departs in his serpent boat out to sea promising some day to renew *the golden age*.⁵⁶ (1937: 65)

Wolfe's description of Rivera's portrayal of Quetzalcóatl in the Right Panel highlights the connection between the representation of the sacred martyr and the consecrated holy land of the 'golden age'. The portrayal of the sacred existence of Quetzalcóatl is inextricably interlinked with the illustration of a sanctified, mythological landscape represented by a mountainous, volcanic terrain and archetypal archaeology. Smith outlines the crucial role played by the 'saint' who

⁵⁶ Emphasis mine.

‘prayed’ in the myths of original chosen people or ‘ethnic election’. These heroic martyrs traverse the homeland and sanctify the territory demarcated for the nation. As he goes on to explain:

Myths of ethnic election may also strengthen a community’s attachment to its historic territory. [...] Only the sacred land and the sanctified soil are fit for the elect, and they can only be redeemed in the land where their fathers and mothers lived, their heroes fought and their saints prayed. To be worthy of forefathers who laid down their lives in these holy mountains and by the banks of these sacred rivers, must we not return to the ancient virtues and forsaken ways? (Smith 1999: 135)

Smith holds that the distinctive contours of the national landscape are thus imbued with a holy sense of origins, which the nation aspires to return to. These original holy lands are graced by revered figures such as Quetzalcóatl in *Prehispanic Mexico*. Paz’s observations concerning the universal process of demarcation of societies and the territorial, geographical symbolism used by nations reinforces this view of the importance of the landscape in the construction of the patria. He argues that an integral component of a nation’s self-definition in terms of ancestry includes a sense of the imaginary landscape of another world: ‘Cada tierra es una sociedad: un mundo y una visión del mundo y del trasmundo’ (Paz 1993a: 393). He also describes the interrelated and overlapping discourses of territorial history, land and symbolic design: ‘Cada historia es una geografía y

cada geografía una geometría de símbolos' (Paz 1993a: 393). The geometrical order in *Prehispanic Mexico* creates this sense of transformative otherworldliness and Rivera's attention to historical detail lends credibility to this generic Mesoamerican world.

Paz also cites the iconic significance of mountains in the iconography of national territorialisation. He argues that the symbolic consecration of the land is also integral to the collective, geographical imagery of the historical construction of Mexican national heritage:

Las geografías también son simbólicas: los espacios físicos se resuelven en arquetipos geométricos que son formas emisoras de símbolos. Llanuras, valles, montañas: los accidentes del terreno se vuelven significativos apenas se insertan en la historia. (Paz 1993a: 393)

Mountains have symbolised national territory through various phases of the history of painting in Mexico. Karen Cordero Reiman suggests that '[t]he Mexican landscape, with characteristic features such as volcanoes and cacti, had been employed as a vehicle for cultural nationalism since the late nineteenth century, in the literature of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano and the paintings of José María Velasco' (1993, 17). Both the Mexican Velasco (1840-1912) and the Englishman Daniel Thomas Egerton (1797-1842) were precursors to Rivera in terms of the representation of landscape. Cordero Reiman also observes the development of landscape painting through the students of the *Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes*: 'Dr. Atl (the alias of Gerardo Murillo) is largely responsible for the translation of Velasco's favourite

theme, captured by the nineteenth-century master with positivist precision, into a synthetic lexicon influenced by impressionism and fauvism [...], which was quickly taken up by his disciples at the academy' (1993: 19). The use of the natural phenomena of mountains and volcanoes was a powerful trope in defining the 'authentic' Mexico therefore existed prior to Rivera's work in the post-revolutionary context. Rivera's representation of the 'original' and post-revolutionary 'Indians' shows a distinctive continuity with these nineteenth-century painters' portrayal of the landscape of Mexico. His projection of the Mesoamerican landscape as sacred spiritual territory creates a comparable transformation of national heritage from commodity to altered reality and pseudo-consecrated public space.

The indigenous people of Mexico were portrayed as an integral part of the landscape during the nineteenth century. In the examples of Egerton and Velasco, (figs. 4.14 and 4.15) the people depicted in the mountain scenes are camouflaged and almost indiscernible apart from their distant homes. The message conveyed is that they are relatively insignificant in relation to the majestic symbol of the mountain/volcano which metonymically signifies all Mexico. The 'Indians' blending into the landscape also show that they are a natural part of the landscape, natives, naturally belonging to that particular earth, therefore the most 'truly' Mexican.

Cordero Reiman describes Atl as having altered the perception of the Mexican landscape after Velasco: '[I]n a political context where land rights became a very concrete issue, Atl notably transforms this commodity into a spiritual symbol, dissociating it from concrete social reality' (1993: 19). This idea of spiritual land resonates strongly with

the theory of 'sacred territory'. Rivera explicitly turns the Mexican landscape into a spiritual symbol as it is the volcano that transforms Quetzalcóatl from man to his transcended astral state (fig. 4.16). It can be argued that this 'sacred' landscape was recommodified into the discourse of post-revolutionary nation-building as the ancestral past becomes objectified in the service of contemporary ethno-mythology.

Mountains represent an unchanging aspect of nature and a sure and solid value in culture not following a temporal order. In Mesoamerican civilization they are of fundamental spiritual importance; they have symbolic and physical religious links to the World Mountain in Aztec cosmology. The volcano is also a particularly significant feature of Aztec mythology, the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtaccíhuatl particularly are connected with Mesoamerican mythology. Rivera employs the symbols of both mountain and volcano in the Right Panel (fig. 4.16) and their depiction as a salient feature in the transmutation of Quetzalcóatl, consecrates them as sacred territory embroiled with ancient cosmology, religion and culture. In the context of the aspect of the National Palace mural which is presented as a linear narrative of past, present and future, read from right to left, this sacred ground of the past, in *Prehispanic Mexico* is an integral facet of the representation of the 'origins' of the future post-revolutionary nation depicted in *Mexico of Today and in the Future*.

A brief consideration of Rivera's fusing of landscape and the Mexican people in other post-revolutionary frescoes will add depth to the understanding of the socio-cultural context of representations of indigenous peoples in *Prehispanic Mexico*. In Rivera's depiction of rural brotherhood *The Embrace* and *Peasants* (fig. 4.17) from his fresco

series *Political Vision of the Mexican People*, he creates a further conflation of people and land. Clustered groups huddle together, echoing the triangular shapes of the mountains on the horizon. This trope of people and mountainous terrain, suggests the solidity and universal strength of the landscape is transferred to the people who are part of it. This image will be echoed by the fraternity expressed through 'the embrace' between *campesinos* during the post-revolutionary period, when the socio-political situation was in chaotic turmoil. The solidity and permanence of the mountains is metonymically linked with the strength of community relationships between indigenous peoples.

In both *Prehispanic Mexico* (fig. 4.1) and the detail from *The Political Vision of the Mexican People* (1923-1924) series, the clustered silhouettes of people reflect the shapes of the landscape. A sense of collectivist sentiment is firmly embedded in the ancient landscape, projecting an image of unity, permanence and strength in these seemingly unseverable social bonds.

Rivera further developed this theme of people and Mexican landscape in his mural series at the Autonomous University of Chapingo entitled *Song of the Earth* (1926-1927). In this series the hybrid symbolism fused three elements: revolutionary martyrs, the land and Mesoamerican symbolism. He presented the indigenous peoples of Mexico and their martyrs and leaders, so deeply embroiled with the Mexican landscape that they are depicted as one and buried deep within it. One of Rivera's most strikingly symbolic mergings of Mexican people and landscape can be seen in the panel of the Chapingo mural entitled *The Blood of the Revolutionary Martyrs*

Fertilising the Earth (fig. 4.18). The shrouds of the martyrs are in the deep red of revolutionary flags and blood, linking the potent image of the life-giving liquid with revolutionary sacrifice. The dark earth tones, of the soil blend with the dark skins of the indigenous agrarian leaders Zapata and Otilio Montaña (1877-1917), whose blood seeps into the earth nourishing the thriving crops above them. Tibol describes the meaning of this imagery:

El simbolismo es claro: la inmolación de los luchadores no ha sido en vano, ellos fecunden las cañas del maíz, alimento milenario del hombre americano. (2002: 85)

Brown observes that possibly 'the most concise illustration of the life out of death concept in pre-Columbian thought is the Aztec glyph for grass (*malinalli*), which has the plant growing out of the skeletal jaws of the earth' (Brown 1986: 231). Paz explains this central tenet of Aztec thought:

La muerte es un espejo que refleja las vanas gesticulaciones de la vida. [...] Para los antiguos mexicanos la oposición entre muerte y vida no era tan absoluta como para nosotros. La vida se prologaba en la muerte. Y a la inversa. La muerte no era el fin natural de la vida, sino fase de un ciclo infinito. Vida, muerte y resurrección eran estadios de un proceso cósmico, que se repetía insaciable. (Paz 1993a: 189-190)

Rivera's image (fig. 4.18) contains strikingly similar elements to the glyph described by Tibol as he links various levels of iconography. Through the image of the revolutionary martyrs soldered on to Mesoamerican symbolism, Rivera makes the blood of the martyrs into the collective blood of the nation. It nourishes the hallowed land where forefathers walked and the sanctified food that forefathers revered. Smith's theory of 'ethnic election' and 'sacred origins' throws light on the meaning of this powerful iconography of blood ties, life and death and decay and regeneration. The combined symbolism of blood, blood-line and nation could therefore be seen as resonating with the 'myth of ancestry'. As the martyrs' blood is the blood of the nation so the sacrificial transformation of Quetzalcóatl is linked to the ancestry of post-revolutionary Mexico. The sacrificial blood in *Prehispanic Mexico* is blended so subtly into the overall design that any sense of cultural disgust at ritual slaughter is mitigated and rendered palatable. Smith's theory elucidates the socio-cultural meaning of this powerful symbolism:

A third function of the golden age is its suggestion of potential through filiation. The emphasis is always on the descendants of heroes, sages, saints, and poets having with themselves, in virtue of their blood relationship, the inner resources to become like their glorious forefathers and foremothers; and hence the capacity of grandsons and granddaughters and their descendants to give birth to a civilization and culture worthy of a golden age. (Smith 1999: 264)

The symbolism of blood has powerful resonances with Aztec human sacrifice as well as religious iconography. Rivera's symbolic image of this links the shrouded revolutionary martyrs with Christian martyrs, Christ's shroud and the blood of sacrifice. This fusion of typically divergent cultural tropes creates a hybridity which makes human sacrifice tolerable to the Western gaze. Within Prehispanic religious culture as well as contemporary indigenous practices, life and death, degeneration and regeneration are part of a whole that entwines the earth with the cosmos. The following contemporary indigenous verse exemplifies this understanding:

Cuando morimos,
 No en verdad morimos,
 Porque vivimos. Resucitamos,
 Seguimos viviendo,
 Despertamos
 Esto nos hace felices.
 (Pomar 1987: 65)

Sun and Maize: Golden and Glorious

The maize growing in *The Blood of the Revolutionary Martyrs Fertilises the Earth* (fig. 4.18) is linked with the symbol of the golden sun, which nourishes and whose realism has been enhanced as it has been constructed around a window that casts sunlight into the room. Hence, myth and reality merge adding credibility to mythology and increasing the likelihood of the collective national imagination willingly suspending disbelief. The blood of the martyrs has soaked their shrouded bodies and nourishes the grain linked to the solar rays.

The sun symbolism in Rivera's work is clearly also connected to the theme of Aztec cosmology. The symbol of the sun in the National Palace Mural illuminates the vision of socio-cultural regeneration through return to a 'golden age'. The dominating solar orbs depicted in the central planes and pinnacles of both Left and Right Walls create a compositional balance and an ideological link between the golden-age of the past in *Prehispanic Mexico* and that of the future in *Mexico of Today and in the Future*. As I stated earlier in the chapter, Rodríguez maintains that what appears to be the sun in *Prehispanic Mexico*, is in fact 'the creative star' (Rodríguez 1969: 246). which 'can be seen in its Tzontémoc-setting sun-incarnation' he stresses the astral dimension which is integral to Aztec religious thought, saying that this symbolism 'indicat[es] that the great trajectory will be continued elsewhere, maybe in the world of shadows, where it proceeds nightly to undergo its hardest trial before being transformed into light once again' (1969: 246). The image of the blazing sun/star that is at the pinnacle of both the Right Panel, depicting the ancient past, and the Left Panel, showing the 'golden' future, literally hangs as a vibrant, fiery blaze symbolically illuminating both 'golden ages'. The temporal order of development of the ethnic community is traceable backwards from the return to the 'golden age' in the future to the sacred moment when the ancestors were born into the original 'golden age'. Each sun image reflects the other and this has the effect of ideologically superimposing these themes and linking them in the construction of a nationalist image, linking prehispanic past and utopian post-revolutionary future.

If we see this linkage of solar symbols in terms of an understanding of Mesoamerican Cosmology, in which time is not represented as

linear, this means that '[t]he circle is not completed, [...] for the simple reason that life is in perpetual motion and that there are no closed circles in it' (Rodríguez 1969: 246). Rivera intertwines discordant elements presenting a progressive circular trajectory, represented by the merging of idealised past in the Right Panel and utopian future in the Left Panel, both linked by the sun symbol.

In the mythology of Quetzalcóatl time is cyclical and here represented by the Tzontémoc-setting sun-incarnation, with its links to cyclical notions of time. Paz explains the connection with solar cycles and life and death: 'El pueblo mexicana se identifica con el culto solar: su dominación es semejante a la del sol que cada día nace, combate, muere y renace' (1993a: 395). He also explains the link between the Aztec solar deity and patron of war, Huitzilopochtli, military death and the death of women in childbirth, who are in the honoured position of combining life and death:

Los muertos—incluso los guerreros caídos en el combate y las mujeres muertas en el parto, compañeros de Huitzilopochtli, el dios solar—desaparecían al cabo de algún tiempo, ya para volver al país indiferenciado de las sombras , ya para fundirse al aire, a la tierra, al fuego, a la sustancia animadora del universo. (Paz 1993a: 190)

The inclusion of maize at the top of the pyramid in zone 8 (fig. 4.10) also has symbolic and religious potency, connected with the sun within Aztec culture. In Aztec thought, Maize was seen to be sacred as it trapped the solar energy of the gods. Thus this revered food

symbolised religious power, as the Aztecs worshipped a solar deity. The hybrid Mexican symbolism in both *The Blood of the Revolutionary Martyrs Fertilising the Earth* and *Prehispanic Mexico*, links religious Mesoamerican iconography and martyrdom from the distant past and with revolutionary martyrs and the sun. Rivera depicts the sale of maize (fig. 4.19) and the *Maize Goddess* (fig. 4.20) in the corridor of the National Palace Mural, illustrating that it was also an everyday product and that religion and the quotidian life were one and the same thing in Aztec culture.

In Mesoamerican cosmological thought Quetzalcóatl was connected to maize as well as solar iconography. Katz outlines a correlation of the transmutation of Quetzalcóatl with maize:

This last period, the fifth sun, was that in which the Aztecs believed they were living. It differed from earlier periods in that the god Quetzalcoatl had given mankind a completely new basis for life: maize. This had until then been stored up by ants and only when the Feathered Serpent changed itself into an ant did this god succeed in stealing a grain of maize and in bringing it to mankind. (1969: 157)

This religious food, the earth, death, rebirth and astral cosmology were all integral to Mesoamerican life. The inclusion of some historical details in the representation of Prehispanic Mexico adds a sense of authenticity which obscures the distortions of overgeneralisations.

Prehispanic Pyramids and Mexican Heritage

Rivera's selection of imagery in the Right Panel combines religious regeneration with sacrifice, warfare, the arts, and Mesoamerican architecture. The Mesoamerican civilizations represented in *Prehispanic Mexico* by the pyramids are also linked to the discourses of archaeology, anthropology and *indigenista* thought. During the resurgence of *indigenismo* in the post-revolutionary period, Gamio had followed in the footsteps of:

Fray Servando Teresa de Mier and Carlos María de Bustamente the chief ideologues of the 1810 Insurgency, [who] had invoked the grandeur of Anáhuac as the chief glory of their Creole patria and defined the Mexican people as a nation which had struggled for three centuries to regain its freedom. (Brading 1988: 75)

The glories of the past are idealised through the presentation of religious harmony in zone 6, creative artistry in zone 6 and ordered-warfare in zone 8. Quetzalcóatl was a peace-loving patron of the arts and recorded to have been against human sacrifice. His central positioning in *Prehispanic Mexico* indicates that he is ruling over a peaceful kingdom. The following excerpt from the *Codex Vienna*, one of the sources believed to have been consulted by Rivera, testifies to this:

This one was very devout. That which the priest Quetzalcoatl required of them, they did well. They did not err, for he said to them, he admonished them: "There is only one god; [he is] named Quetzalcoatl. He requireth nothing;

you shall offer him, you shall sacrifice before him only serpents, only butterflies.” All the people obeyed the divine command of their priest. (quoted in Carrasco 1982: 87-88)

The earthly Quetzalcóatl is therefore a benevolent ‘civilised’ martyr who did not advocate ritual slaughter. As stated earlier in this chapter, the sacrifice in *Prehispanic Mexico* is depicted by victims waiting in tranquil poses and a blood-red stream running down one pyramid that fits neatly into Rivera’s design. None of the cruelty and slaughter of Aztec culture is depicted. As the compositional balance creates a sense of communal tranquillity and harmony, an idyll is portrayed. A distorted amalgamated idealised vision is the result, but the elements of truth and detail add ‘authenticity’ to the myth. Smith (1999) explains, that a mixture of fact and fiction adds authenticity to nationalist mythology.

The representation of the nation’s origins as its ‘Indian’ past in *Prehispanic Mexico* is an ambivalent mixture of fact and fiction. On the one hand, it does validate the indigenous as a worthy part of the ‘Mexican character’ and indeed part of a ‘golden age’ that was denigrated by the Conquest. On the other hand, it relegates ‘Indian’ culture to the realms of the past, regarding the culture and voices of contemporary indigenous peoples to be so insignificant as to be irrelevant. As Guy Rozat Dupeyron argues: ‘El del pasado americano es un indio muerto, un indio desaparecido desde hace tiempo. Por ello no puede protestar, no puede venir a clamar por su identidad’ (2002: 23).

The Pyramid is the archetypal iconographic symbol which is known worldwide to connote ancient mysteries and lost civilisations. The symbol of the pyramid was also widely used in nineteenth-century Independence ceremonies. In *Prehispanic Mexico* Rivera combines the horizon of the pyramid with the inclusion of the natural mountainous feature of the Mexican landscape. Quetzalcóatl's green quetzal-feathered headdress merges with the pyramid behind stylistically symbolising the cohesion between Mesoamerican architecture and this religious figure (fig. 4.21). This design illustrates an important fact that represents a degree of historical detail; in Toltec culture, pyramids were regarded as divine gifts given to Quetzalcóatl:

The majestic houses of worship glimmering with their marvellous jewelled facades were laid along lines of cardinal axiality reflecting the Toltec commitment to the imitation of celestial order and influence. Within this ceremonial order stood Quetzalcoatl's special temple, which functioned as the Toltec cosmic mountain. (Carrasco 1982: 86)

Rivera's geometrical design of the pyramid, however, simultaneously diverges from a realistic depiction by simplification. In the Codex Florentino a depiction of Quetzalcóatl's temple describes its splendour as an implied reflection of his magnificence:

Quetzalcoatl was looked upon as a god. He was worshipped and prayed for in former times in Tollan, and there his temple stood very high, very tall. Extremely tall, extremely

high. Very many were its steps and close together, hardly wide but narrow. Upon each step indeed one's foot could not be straightened. (Codex Florentino in Carrasco 1982:86)

In Mesoamerican culture, the construction of pyramids was much more complex than Rivera's one-dimensional, material depiction. They were in fact built to imitate the contours of a physical mountain which was integrally bound to the idea of a spiritual, cosmic mountain. As Callemann maintains: '[...] the ancients, with their sometimes highly developed intuition, built pyramids as symbols of the World Mountain (and possibly to create enhanced resonance with it)' (Callemann 2004: 59).

Rivera's contradictory *indigenista* stance at once elevates through exaggeration and distorts through simplification. This ambivalence is also evident in post-revolutionary anthropological discourses. The similarities between the latter and Rivera's representations of *Prehispanic Mexico* are striking. In keeping with the theoretical paradigm of the *Manifiesto of the Union of Mexican Workers, Technicians, Painters and Sculptors* and their glorification of indigenous artistic roots, Gamio rejected neo-classical canons of aesthetic judgement and demanded a revaluation of native art-forms (Brading 1988: 76). The most famous achievement of Mexico's premier anthropologist was the restoration and reconstruction of the architectural site of Teotihuacán the results of which were published in 1921 as *La población del valle de Teotihuacán* (The Population of the valley of Teotihuacán) which included a study of the temple of Quetzalcóatl which he explored and restored. 'Durante las exploraciones en la Ciudadela se descubrió uno

de los edificios más notables de la época prehispánica: el Templo de Quetzalcóatl' (Vela Ramírez and Solanes Carraro 2001: 28).

One of Gamio's chief accomplishments 'was to reinstate Anáhuac as the glorious foundation of Mexican history and culture, thus reversing the history of Liberal derision towards the indigenous' (Brading 1988: 76). Similarly Rivera 'persisted with his collection [of prehispanic sculpture] and eventually spent what remained of his fortune on the walls to house it' in his famous building named Anahuacalli (Marnham 1999: 321) (fig. 4.22). Brown explains that the word 'Anahuacalli' is a combination of the words *anahuac* meaning 'valley of Mexico' and *calli* which is the word for 'house', which in Rivera's case is 'a four storey "pyramid-museum-tomb" that includes elements of Aztec and Mayan architecture and now houses his collection (1986: 139).

Guy Ferraro has noted how, ethnoscientists have distinguished between 'emic' and 'etic' methodological approaches to indigenous communities:

The emic approach [...] attempts to understand a culture from the native's point of view. The etic approach on the other hand, attempts to understand culture in terms of the categories of the ethnographer. (Ferraro 1992: 74)

Despite his claim to authenticity and his borrowing from various disparate indigenous sources, Rivera's representational reductionism, albeit unwittingly, demonstrates this outsider's view derived from European cultures, which anthropologists would describe as 'etic'. As

a result, similarities and continuities with the work of traveller-reporter artists can be discerned in Rivera's work. It may be argued that the artist's long apprenticeship in Europe had trained his eye and mind to view his native Mexico from a traveller's perspective with an outsider's eye. The buildings and ancient monuments and customs depicted in *Prehispanic Mexico*, show distanced figures in an ancient, obsolete, world. Although the figures are actively engaged in a living reality, it is a distant lost world and a far cry from the actuality of 'Indian' life in Rivera's time. A comparison with Rivera's representation of the Mexican Pyramid and that of the traveller-reporter artists links his work in a historical trajectory to European, 'etic' presentations of indigenous cultures.

Gruzinski also notes that the imposition of Western categories should be avoided, reminding us that certain ethnocentric racial constructions were developed by ethnohistory and archaeology: 'In the case of Mexico, indigenous accounts reveal that the idea of Nahua culture or Meso-American culture is a pure construct by Western observers' (Gruzinski 2002: 28).

Rivera's observations and representations of indigenous peoples were made through his travels and studying the secondary historical sources I have mentioned. Thus his view was distant and academic rather than experiential. Lines of historical continuity can be traced back from the artist's 'etic' presentation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. These genealogies are consistent with Smith's view of nationalist ethno-mythology as a historical phenomenon with distinct socio-cultural genealogies. These 'outsider' constructions can be traced by considering the depiction of Mesoamerican archaeology by

traveller-reporter artists and comparing them with Rivera's representation of the pyramid. Images of pyramids were first depicted in Mexico through discourses, which were initially circumscribed by the European views of certain adventurers. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth-century, different overseas artists and explorers from France, Italy, England, Germany and the United States travelled to Latin America. These traveller-explorer artists recorded the landscape, archaeology, flora and fauna, and were fascinated by the romance of the 'exotic' customs and the extraordinary landscapes of the 'New World'. Artists embarked on expeditions to explore and record features of human and natural geography in all areas of the New World. European powers funded traveller-artists to investigate nature through systematic observation seeing this form of knowledge as a reliable route to modernization and material progress (Ades 1989).

The most celebrated examples of these adventurers are the Prussian Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), and Englishman Frederick Catherwood (1799–1854) with American John Lloyd Stephens (1805–1852). These scholar-adventurers were all motivated by the Enlightenment force of worldly investigation and a move away from the religious conversion function of art which had existed in Mexico since the time of the conquest (Ades 1989). I will concentrate on Stevens and Catherwood here to illustrate the similarities in the representations of the 'etic' gaze of these travellers and Rivera's depiction of indigenous peoples in *Prehispanic Mexico*.

Between 1839 and 1843, Stephens and Catherwood collaborated to create archaeological travel accounts entitled 'Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan' (1841) and 'Incidents of Travel

in Yucatan' (1843). R. Tripp Evans describes the images as 'startlingly precise' and notes that 'the production costs fell so low that the works fell within the reach of a middle-class reading public' (Tripp Evans 2004: 45). Catherwood tried sincerely to depict the discovered sites authentically and he found 'the designs so intricate and complicated and the subjects so entirely new' that his initial sketches 'failed to satisfy himself or even me...the "idol" seemed to defy his art' (Stephens quoted in Tripp Evans 2004: 52). These explorers depicted the landscape and ancient monuments of Mexico. The languishing 'Indians' who often surround these scenes are depicted as part of this lost world as well as being at one with the wild and untamed landscape. They blend into the background and buildings defined by the larger forces that surround them.

The 'Indians' in Catherwood's lithograph *Ruins at Uxmal* (fig 4.23), merge so 'naturally' into the mysterious, ancient, ruined background, that they are metonymically linked to this environment and hence part of the enigma of a fallen, mysterious and exotic civilisation. A sense of loss surrounds their redundancy as they indulge in playful pursuits, languishing around the scene with no apparent purpose. Rivera's imagery in *Prehispanic Mexico*, although on the surface strongly contrasting with Catherwood's, has many underlying ideological similarities. Catherwood's 'Indians' are featureless and distant, they blend accommodatingly into the background and with the buildings and scenery, as if modern Western 'progress' had passed them by. These 'Indians' and their glorious 'golden-age', represented by the once splendid, now decaying architecture, are a thing of the past as is their dignity. The pyramid and people are linked aesthetically and

ideologically. The white clothing links the indigenous people with the white building and the browns of their skin tones are echoed in the dark vegetation that grows out of the ruins. The towering majesty of the buildings causes them to shrink — in comparison they are diminished, as is the once-glorious ‘golden age’ of civilisation which they represent.

The occasional empathetic observations, revealed through the spirit of enquiry of the traveller-reporter artists, are an example of the internal contradictions that illustrate the complex dynamics of Eurocentric hegemonic representations of race. For instance, Stephens comments on the error of judgement that perceives Mayan architecture as the primitive work of barbarians. His response to the re-discovery of the archaic Mayan acropolis at Copán was immediate and anti-colonial, as he exclaimed ‘America, say historians, was peopled by savages, but savages never carved these stones’ (Stephens quoted in von Hagen 1973: 135). The stones are a marker of ‘civilisation’ but that civilisation exists as relics of the distant past. Similarly, in Rivera’s *Prehispanic Mexico*, the past is living through and linked, in the socio-cultural imagination of modern Mexico, to the ancient stones of Pyramids being renovated in the post-revolutionary years. Images such as these diminish living contemporary indigenous peoples into part of a ‘disappearing’ race, as they are rendered invisible or part of a crumbling past. Renovation of Prehispanic sites in the post-revolutionary years was parallel to the redemption of the ‘Indian’ out of the atavistic trap of his backward folk culture.

Wolfe describes some of Rivera’s travels to prehispanic sites that had been ‘rediscovered’ by Stevens and Catherwood. He explains how

the trip which Rivera took with Vasconcelos ‘on one of his voyages of cultural exploration and propaganda to the peninsula of Yucatán’ with several poets and painters, ‘proved fruitful for Diego’ (Wolfe 1939: 148). Wolfe links Rivera’s observations in Yucatán with his revolutionary politics and his awareness of the realities of the lives of peons:

His mind was stirred by the great ruins at Uxmal and Chichen Itzá; and even more by the dimly comprehended spectacle of the uprising of the hennequen peons, the *Ligas de Resistencia*, and the “Communist” governor, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, who ruled the state of Yucatán. (1939:148)

Rivera’s political motivation was strongly embroiled with this political awareness of the lives of the ‘Indian’. The redesignated status of the post-revolutionary indigenous peoples of Mexico is one element of the identity which Rivera intended to project in *Prehispanic Mexico*. As Le Clézio explains :

Dès son retour au Mexique, Diego confond la cause indigéniste avec la cause révolutionnaire. Après son voyage initiatique au Yucatán et au Campeche, il s’enflamme pour tout ce qui est <<authentiquement américain >> [...] La visite du temple des jaguars, orné de peintres murales, est le point de rencontre de l’expression populaire et du sacré du Nouveau Monde. (Le Clézio 1993 : 253)

Rivera developed the theme of the pyramid further after painting *Prehispanic Mexico* in 1929. Marnham notes the artist's efforts to bring together diverse elements: '[i]n the galleries on the first floor of the National Palace, [where] Rivera achieved his last great series of frescoes and his final attempt to reconcile his Mexican nationalism and his international socialism' (Marnham 1998:322). Here, as mentioned in Chapter Three, he depicted a series of pre-Columbian civilisations along the right corridor of the National Palace between 1942 and 1951. An example of one of these, *The Totonac Civilisation*, is reproduced in fig. 4.24. The first two Panels of the Right Corridor Series are sub-titled What the World Owes to Mexico and The Culture of Ancient Mexico.

In these later corridor panels, the series of Mesoamerican civilisations present a much more detailed account of pre-Hispanic life than *Prehispanic Mexico*. This attention to detail, however, as I discussed earlier, obscures the inevitable reductionism implicit in such an ambitious project of representing the complex diversity of divergent cultures spanning many centuries.

One such detail in terms of an attempt at 'authentic' representation is Rivera's alignment of certain features of *History of the Mexican People*. The architectural structure and layout of Mesoamerican cities was consistently designed around 'a sacred mountain of sustenance, a ball court, and a cosmic tree that adjoined the town and the five magnetic points of the cosmos' (Florescano 1999: 131-132). The city was a consecrated space oriented around an essentially sacred centre at which was located a temple pyramid. In the religious symbolism of the centre, the sacred point was the intersection of cosmological

dimensions: heaven, earth and hell. The priests who directed the construction of buildings and sacred sites aligned their architecture with the 'cardinal compass points of the universe'. The interrelated socio-cosmological centres acted as 'centripetal and centrifugal guides, pulling the sacred and social energies into the center and diffusing the supernatural and royal powers out into the kingdom' (Carrasco 1982: 70).

Rivera aspired to empathise with Mesoamerican cultures and attain an 'emic' understanding by researching widely and consulting experts such as Alfonso Caso, who advised him on the construction of Anahuacalli. Rivera also paid attention to detail in placing the National Palace mural in its location with features which replicate geographical reality. The volcanoes and mountains merge the boundaries of fact and fiction in the fresco as they are both symbolically momentous and in actuality a depiction of the Mexican landscape beyond the National Palace. Rivera had designed the mural to be aligned to actual geographic sites; the buildings correspond to the directions of real Mexican locations: for example, *Prehispanic Mexico* is painted on the North Wall and Tula is to the North of Mexico City.⁵⁷

Each wall in effect is dematerialised in favour of a window looking into places and events corresponding to their actual geographic directional locations. To the viewer looking "through" these planes the wall becomes an agent of mediation between the inside viewing experience and the

⁵⁷ The volcanoes are not however lined up along the axis which points towards Popocatepétl and Ixtaccíhuatl, the two volcanoes dominating the valley of Mexico as these are to the East of Mexico.

outside history and landscape and becomes in turn the product of that dialectic, fixing it as imagery for the privileged position of the viewer. (Folgarait 1998: 136)

In attempting to align depictions in the fresco with the actual physical landscape, Rivera is making a gesture towards the alignment of the building with sacred space which was integral to the Mesoamerican Tollan.

The complex and detailed religious cosmography of Mesoamerican pyramids, however, is not represented in Rivera's. This architecture was built to precision in terms of alignment to astrological aspects and followed distinctive methods of construction based on religious cosmological premises.

In *The Critique of the Pyramid* (1993), Octavio Paz wrote an incisive condemnation of Mexico's National Museum of Anthropology. His core grievance 'was that the architecture of the building made the museum's Aztec hall into the culmination and synthesis of all pre-Hispanic culture' (Lomnitz 2001: 226). Paz's condemnation was based on the argument that the Museum space had presented a distorted picture of Mesoamerican history. The 'construction of the Aztec empire as both the centrepiece of the pre-Hispanic world and the antecedent of the independent Mexican nation negates cultural pluralism, idealised a strong central state, and falsified the pre-Columbian past (Lomnitz 2001: 226). Paz's argument recognises the mythologizing of the presentation of the prehispanic past in Mexico's museum culture: 'Entrar en el Museo de Antropología es penetrar en una arquitectura hecha de la materia solemne del mito' (1993: 413). He argues that the

museum of Anthropology creates a 'temple' where the belief systems of the Mexican nation can be transmitted through mythology and spurious representations of 'original' cultures:

[...] su versión de la civilización mesoamericana la simplifica por una parte y, por la otra, la exagera: de ambas maneras la empobrece. La exultación y glorificación de México-Tenochtitlan transforma el Museo de Antropología en un templo. El culto que se propaga entre sus muros es el mismo que inspira a los libros escolares de historia nacional y a los discursos de nuestros dirigentes: la pirámide escalonada y la plataforma del sacrificio. (Paz 1993a: 414)

The National Museum was the direct precursor of the current structure of Mexican national and regional museums of history and anthropology. Luis Gerardo Morelos-Moreno illustrates the institutionalisation of indigenous artefacts along patriotic lines in the National Museum which, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, provided a ritual showcase 'providing a new basis for national identity that included the prehispanic past together with the War of Independence' and significantly underlines that 'the National Museum paid homage [...] to the mystified, fossilised native past while ignoring the Indian present' (Morales-Moreno 1994: 181). The National Museum played a significant role in the ritual institutionalisation of indigenous culture which allowed many pre-Columbian artefacts to be viewed by the Mexican people:

[...] in the Mexico of the 1890's the visitor was still led by force through the halls of the National Museum to view what seemed to him, and to the world at large, a forest of stone heads and idols decorated with writhing serpents. (Horcasitas 1980: xv)

Both the 'ritual experience' of the museum spectacle, and the socio-cultural practice of viewing *Prehispanic Mexico*, guide the viewer's path through a 'place/time where normal categories of experience are suspended in order to enact a transformation of values' (Folgarait 1998: 136). Folgarait stresses 'the ability of ritual to accept the contradictions of the real world into its own transformative space and render them resolved and uniquely coherent' (1998: 136). The reductionist representation of Prehispanic Mexico in both these spectacles of public display and ritual contribute to an institutionalisation of the nationalist ethnomythology of 'origins' and 'ancestry'. The real existence of the everyday indigenous peoples is hence obscured by a smokescreen of appearances which make believe that a heterogeneous inclusive community is integral to the Mexican nation. Thus the conscience of the nation is salved and the projected image of the Mexican is seen to be inclusive of all ethnic categories. A projected public inversion occurs where contemporary post-revolutionary marginalisation, hegemonic cultural domination and socio-economic exploitation of indigenous peoples is obscured by the glorification of the 'Indian' past. The comments which Paz makes with regard to museum culture and the representation of the prehispanic

past are cogently appropriate to *Prehispanic Mexico* on the Right Wall of the National Palace Mural:

Así el Museo expresa un sentimiento de culpa, sólo que, por una operación de transferencia y descarga estudiada y descrita muchas veces por el psicoanálisis, la culpabilidad se transfigura en glorificación de la víctima. (Paz 1993a: 414)

As Guy Rozat Dupeyron argues, the image of the indigenous peoples of Mexico as 'downtrodden' and deficient is also part of this salving of public conscience. He argues that this is of paramount importance to visitors and 'outsiders':

Para disimular las, a veces, muy sucias maniobras del discurso histórico, se ha hecho comparecer a un indio blanqueado, que desempeña bien su papel de indio: dócil, pobre y lastimero, siempre mendigando una caridad, que calmará la mala conciencia de los turistas de la historia. (2002: 23)

The redemption of the impoverished 'Indian' is the subject of the Left Panel of the National Palace Mural which I investigate in Chapter Five. Rivera's imagery clearly compartmentalises the modern redeemed 'Indian' in the Left Panel depicting Mexico of *Today and in the Future* and the glorious indigenous past in *Prehispanic Mexico*. The 'Indian' in the latter, although once part of a 'golden age', is now a memory of lost civilisation that no longer exists. The artist's depiction of the thriving,

living past is more important than the absent 'Indian' culture of the present. This is presented in the Left Panel as so fallen into obscurity that the only path to cultural redemption is through a regenerating modernisation and inculcation into Western values.

Chapter Five: Mexico of Today and in the Future: *Overview*

The Left Panel of the National Palace Mural triptych was painted from 1934-1935 and entitled *Mexico of Today and in the Future*. (fig 5.1). The composition of this panel is balanced with that of *Prehispanic Mexico* on the Right Wall. These two panels reflect many structural and thematic elements of each other. The Left Panel is 7.50 x 9.00 metres and appears secondary to the vast expanse of the Central Panel which is juxtaposed with both the right and left walls. The relative simplicity of the historical frame depicted in the contents of the two flanking panels contrasts with the condensed complexity of the Central Panel. The narrative of the Left Panel follows an s-shape boustrophedon⁵⁸ curve pattern which can also be seen in certain Mesoamerican picture-writing.

Although a historical, chronological narrative is being told in the Left Panel, the instantaneous way the reader experiences the work as an overall image actually complicates and contradicts a narrative structure. The experience of viewing the mural, in reality, is largely delineated by the path of the stairwell and the tendency of the eye to take in information as a whole and focus on random sections rather than fix on different areas. Folgarait describes this effect:

[...] the composition depends upon an instantaneity of vision as experienced by the viewer, the all-at-once, nontemporal quality of seeing the mural as a whole image field. (1998:100)

⁵⁸ To be read turning (in this case) from right to left then left to right (in other cases vice versa).

Whilst moving up the stairway the eye meets the line of workers who are fore-grounded with their light coloured clothing and working poses. The confusion of the crowded figures first encountered and others anonymously represented by a sea of hats and hands gives a sense of a nameless mass of people. There is an atmosphere of violence, danger and unrest in the lowermost zone of the mural which is littered with guns, knives and swastikas. The undulating lines of insurgent crowds being attacked and threatened or fighting back, contrast strongly with the squared linearity of the figures enclosed within the metal compartments and with the ordered serenity of the three figures opposite the bearded man on the horizon. Everything below these final scenes is compacted or hemmed in. A changing atmosphere is generated as a result of times of conflict juxtaposed with a peaceful solution. Each zone acts as a foil intensifying the mood of the other through the contrast of shifting events. Various forms of writing catch the eye as these scripts are distinguished from the other figurative elements as they are in text form rather than pictorial representations.

The Left Panel can be divided into three main zones which I will name zones 9 to 11 (fig. 5.1a). I will follow the narrative through the path of the snake-like boustrophedon curve and, in doing so, consider the aesthetic, historical and socio-political dimensions of the Left Panel.

Zone 9: The Downtrodden Mexican

Zone 9 (fig. 5.2) shows the daily lot of the oppressed Mexican peasant and worker: a failing strike, atrocities, exploitation by the

Church and subjugation by armed gunmen in the service of the powerful. In this area the colour composition is dominated by sharp blues, earth tones and white; there are flashes of red in a peasant's skirt, the strikers' banners, a middle class woman's clothing and the student's copy of *El Capital*. The use of orange and red counterpoised with a range of blue and grey tones composes a brusque simplicity which is illuminated by a comparatively even play of light from the upper balcony onto the left wall. The whites and light blues draw the eye to the figures of the workers and peasants. The composition is densely populated with anonymous figures represented by hands, hats and unidentifiable uniforms.

In the lower right corner is the back of a *charro* (fig 5.3), who is the starting point of the narrative. He is dressed in brown wearing a sombrero and a jacket embroidered with a cross and inscribed with the words 'CABALLEROS DE COLON'. He is literally faceless as are many of the peasants depicted throughout the mural.

Beside him are a peasant man, woman and child dressed in white clothing and yellow sombreros (fig.5.4). They are bent down gathering corn and the man holds a sickle. The dark brown skins of this trio contrasts with their torn, white apparel.

In front of the peasants and *charro* are three mounted *Camisas Doradas*. Their hats are decorated with three different badges: the Mexican flag, a star and an eagle. They have thin moustaches and closed or covered eyes. Behind these horsemen are the yellow straw sombreros of other hidden figures and a sign reading '*comunidades agrarias*'. A representative *comunista* and *agrarista* hang from the tree to show the murder of those choosing to resist the political order (fig.

5.5). Their distorted faces are drawn in simple caricature in which it is hard to distinguish one from the other. The signs around their necks read: '*Ahorcado por latro-faccioso comunista*' and '*por rebelde y sedicioso agrarista*'. Beside these hanged men is a red banner with white writing reading '*HUELGA*' under which is a crowd of people, one of whom is holding a rock and others sticks and machetes. Two women's faces stare out from the crowd of strikers. A woman and a man cover their eyes and heads as blood streams down their faces. A group of masked armed forces wearing dark grey uniforms are fighting with these workers. One soldier's hand holds a grenade another soldier points his rifle butt towards a worker as if ready to strike him. Above the bayonets of the masked soldiers are a row of four crosses and one swastika. The strike depicted in zone 9 shows people being defeated by organised armed forces (fig 5.5).

Above the cluster of people gleaning is another trio of *campesinos* (fig. 5.6), in this image their faces are visible and distinguishable from each other. Horses eyes are in line with these three peasants being threatened by guns which are pointed towards them and held by the hands of hidden figures. The men at gunpoint depicted here are likely to be victims of the *ley fuga* which was the shooting of an arrested man under the allegation that he was trying to escape from the authorities. This was a legal trick used by Calles, who often made use of brutal means to achieve his ends (Alba 1973: 162). The *camisas doradas* a 'semi-fascist army of patriot bullies' (Alba 1973: 176), are depicted on horseback to one side as a reminder of their involvement in state killings. World Depression and the Wall Street crash in 1929 had long-term repercussions on the Mexican economy and the ensuing

‘rule of the shadowy *jefe máximo* [Calles] became more repressive’ with the fascist-style *camisas doradas* terrorising any opponents of the Calles regime (Williamson 1992: 396). These three peasants are in line with three horses; the six pairs of eyes on the same plane connect the agraristas and horses. The tones of brown depicted on man and horse are so similar as to blend in together, creating a harmonious unity and suggesting the subordinate status of peasants.

Moving to the left of these figures is a basilica containing a church congregation (fig 5.7) and an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe (fig. 5.8). This gathering marks a border between this conflict and zone 10 above. Two middle class women are interestingly placed in the church congregation. The one wearing red is holding a manuscript, and the sisters are perched amongst faces singing with hymn books and holding bibles. The lighter complexioned figures of a man wearing a suit, and the two middle-class women are grouped together on the right hand side of the church congregation. Their distinguishable features stare out of the picture in a gesture which contrasts with the inward-looking stance of the darker-skinned characters on the left of the composition. Their outward-looking, hopeful expressions look beyond the confines of the frame. The optimism of this pose suggests they are aware of something above the restrictions displayed by the sombre, anonymous figures within the cluster whose heads are bowed in subservient adoration. The representatives of modernity are looking outwards whilst the inward-looking poses of the church congregation reflect their supposed parochial arrested-development. The contrasting colours, expressions and stances between darker and lighter skinned figures act as a foil to one another accentuating the metonymic

dichotomy of outward-looking progress and inward-looking backwardness.

People with shrouded heads reach their hands out towards a box where they are placing money. The plaque in this box reads 'INDULGENCIAS' (indulgences) (fig. 5.9). At the sides of the icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe are a United States flag and another squared tricolour flag (fig. 5.8) which represents the forces of *Cristo Rey* (Tibol 1999 [1935]: 101). The atmosphere within the Basilica is solemn and silent. The heads are dark-skinned, obscured, bowed and covered. They are reduced to profiles and it is difficult to distinguish who each of the four hands belong to. This merging of hands and heads which are undistinguishable from one another, gives the impression of solidarity and community. The squared symmetry of the different coloured hands creates a unity which reinforces the image of the homogenised 'Indian'. This symbol of the devout peasant is encoded with an implicit message which contains racist elements integral to the racial theories of the post-revolutionary period which will be discussed later in this chapter.

'Subservient' Worship

The only clearly recognizable Mexican figures in this section are the Kahlo sisters. This anonymity of figures again represents the 'peasant/Indian' as a type rather than a distinguishable, specific individual. Perched underneath the church icons Frida wears a gold chain with a star symbol and Cristina is wearing red and black and is holding the manuscript. Between the sisters are two children who are both looking upwards with reverent gazes towards the balcony out of

the scene and holding another written document. Frida protectively touches the shoulder of a boy who is seen in profile and appears to be singing from a hymn book; next to him another child reads a bible with a cross on the open page. Above her the grey-haired man with a moustache wearing a disgruntled expression is a portrait Dwight W. Morrow, who was United States Ambassador to Mexico. A man dressed in white, peasant clothing kneels before this scene with his arms outstretched in a gesture of praise before the church building and symbols before him. The large peasant, clad in white with his arms stretched out appears to be a blind devotee entranced by the rituals of the Catholic Church. Two priests' faces with sardonic expressions watch money pile up in a vessel before them. Behind the church crowd is a confession booth with a notice reading '*la penitencia*'.

Candles and flags surround the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Above her in the middle of the flat roof section of the Basilica is the occult symbol of the 'all seeing eye of Horus' which is an eye within a triangle. This symbol may also represent money and capitalism as it is also to be found on the United States dollar bill. The inclusion of this esoteric symbol may therefore be an allusion to church links with freemasonry and United States capital. Here Rivera uses iconography expressive of the reality of political oppression and the manipulation of religion by cynical powers. The sacred and the secular clash in the small details of the scene; the worshipping peasants and the image of the Virgin are 'spiritual' and the gaze of the materialistic priests is on the money piling up in coffers. Rivera depicts the link between United States capital and the oppression of the Catholic Church by flanking the icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe (who oversees peasants giving

money) with a United States flag balanced with a *Cristero* flag of the pro-Catholic insurgency.

The dark-skinned passive devotees have their heads bowed in simple subservience to the ideology of Catholicism. They are depicted as complicit with their own oppression. The most prominent inward looking figure visually dominates the rest of an also inward-looking congregation. He is wearing a simple, white costume characteristic of the Mexican peasant. The plain clothing of the subservient worshippers contrasts with the modern apparel of the outward looking figures of the Kahlo sisters, and Morrow. The viewer's eye is drawn to the peasant's back and his outstretched arms. His head is placed in profile amongst the figures giving money. The subservience of his gesture is shown by his stance of bended knees and the focus on his back which accentuates the corporeal dimension and has an objectifying, depersonalising effect devoid of any facial characterisation and individuality.

Wall of Workers

Towards the far left corner three workers stand on or behind a staggered wall (fig. 5.10). A welder is depicted with his face covered by a protective mask. Another faceless worker bears a load of bricks on his back and behind him one more collects bricks. A fourth worker dressed in blue holds a resting hammer and is in a conversation with a student who is clutching *El Capital* and pointing towards either the bourgeois students behind him, or the figure of Marx above (fig. 5.11). The wall which is staggered in front of this group of workers echoes the shape of the loads carried on the back of the Aztec workers in

Prehispanic Mexico (fig. 4.11). The placing of the workers in dialogue is significant; as the worker progresses from being oppressed to being redeemed through education, he ascends the steps of the staggered wall just as the viewer climbs up the stairway. The book *El Capital* symbolizes a rational and educated progress led by the tenets of Western Enlightenment values. The peasants below working in the fields and worshipping in church are unified in a group yet isolated and absorbed in their tasks; they are contrastingly non-communicative.

Calles and Corruption

Rivera made it clear, that in painting the left wall his main intention was to portray social realities under the political reign of Calles and the *Maximato*. Wolfe also states, Rivera's intention in this section of the fresco was to depict the reality of the National Revolutionary Party, PNR:

[...] he would paint the Mexico of the National Revolutionary Party with its false and fantastic demagoguery masking a semi-absolutist regime, its personal dictatorship absurdly dressed in scraps of the borrowed finery of democratic and Socialist trimmings, its domination by the newly rich "Men of the Revolution" who had acquired their wealth by trafficking in its splendid promises to their own ends. (Wolfe 1939: 296)

The theme of this entire wall is both an explicit critique of Calles and the *Maximato* and a celebration of the hoped for Marxist Utopia during the new Cárdenas presidency (1934-1940). The artist's recent experiences in America between 1930 and 1933 had also shaped his political outlook and disillusionment with the government's failure to deliver the promises of the Mexican Revolution:

My vision now crystallized in the acid of my recent bitter experience, I began to paint Mexico today and tomorrow. I depicted the betrayal of the Revolution by self-seeking demagogues. In contrast with their millennial promises, I painted the reality of Mexico today: strikes being crushed; farmers and workers being shot or sent off to the penal colony of Islas Marias. (Rivera 1991: 131)

Rivera intended the Mexican worker to see a brutal depiction of their own repression under the Calles government. He also provides a solution and a way forward for the peoples of Mexico through the themes of socialist education and an awakening of a Marxist consciousness.

The representations of barbarity and political violence in this zone (5.5 Strike) are direct references to the misdemeanours of Calles and the *Maximato*. In 1929, Calles commanded the cessation of agrarian distribution which was enshrined in Article 27 of the 1917 revolutionary Constitution because he deemed it to be detrimental to the economy. In between the years of Carranza's agrarian law of January 1915 and the end of the *Maximato* in December 1934, only

18.7 million acres of land had been redistributed to 800,000 peasants. The country at this time was still predominantly rural accounting for 70 percent of the economically active population in 1930 (Aguilar Camín and Meyer 1989: 76). Nevertheless, Rivera states that the intended audience of his mural is the working-class Mexican:

Pueden los obreros y campesinos mexicanos ver en el Palacio Nacional los retratos de algunos compañeros de ellos hablando a las masas, y ver a esta masa ametrallada por un automóvil blindado marcado con la svástica accionado eléctricamente por el Presidente de la República, y atacados por la policía con fusiles y gases asfixiantes.
(Rivera in Tíbol 1999 [1935]: 102)

The Mexican Communist Party formed in 1919 was linked economically and ideologically to the Communist International. The Communist Party was illegal between 1925 and 1935 in Mexico. Calles was known to have executed Communists and anyone else who dared oppose the regime, and police opened fire on many demonstrations and strikes. Rivera depicts this violence graphically, showing police attacking unarmed demonstrators. In one such incident during the provincial uprising led by General Gonzalo Escobar, the *Jefe Máximo* took charge of the war department and whilst crushing the rebellion took the opportunity to order the execution of several communists who had used the situation for the organisation of soviets along the lines of the Communist International (Alba 1973: 170).

The police and military in this zone are represented by dark suits, their faces covered by gas masks which have the effect of reinforcing their dehumanised brutality. The undifferentiated 'masses' are represented by Rivera as struggling and suffering together. This image erases the diversity of culture. It is difficult to distinguish the indigenous peoples from the 'catch-all' category of *mestizo*. In this way cultural complexity is erased. The representational unity ignores divisions within and between indigenous communities as well as internal divisions such as those between traditional and modern 'Indians'.

Telling Stories

Rivera's outsider depiction of 'Indian' life has resonances with the paternalism of the Mexican state which decided what was best for the indigenous peoples of Mexico within the remit of governmental imperatives. The words of Lenore Keeshig-Tobias quoted below are salutary in understanding the implicit message of Rivera's vanguard intentions:

[...] I'm going to tell those stories for you,' he'll say. 'You're far too primitive to tell them for yourself. I'm going to let the world know what you think. I'm going to tell the world how you think when you think. (Keeshig-Tobias 2005: 267)

Rivera maintained his Marxist vision of a revolutionary future and art which would work 'for the good of [...] the masses'. In a letter to the *Secretario de Educación Pública* co-written with the composer Carlos

Chávez in 1934, the artists speak of having created a revolutionary art for the people on an international scale; describing their work as ‘la producción y difusión de un arte para las masas, de contenido revolucionario’ (Chávez and Rivera 1999 [1934]: 56). In terms of indigenous politics it is important to distinguish between cultural products *for* the people and those created *by* the people. Rivera’s representation is yet another ‘top down’ model of history rather than the ‘history from below’ that it purports to be.

This top down, ‘etic’ model of history is always in danger of presenting an un-nuanced over-simplification through lack of real experience of the subject matter. Stereotyping and cultural projection are often the outcome of the most well-intentioned attempts to represent ‘the other’. In the case of Rivera’s portrayal of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, difference and diversity are subsumed as they are presented under the umbrella of the proletarian ‘masses’. On the subject of ‘the anonymous masses’, which we can see clearly depicted in zone 9, Wolfe unwittingly acknowledges that the artist depicts the Mexican people as undifferentiated objects rather than the subjects and conscious authors of their own history:

Along with the identifiable figures there would be everywhere the unidentifiable, along with the named the nameless representatives of the many-millions generations of Indian warriors and slaves, of peons and labourers and guerrilla fighters, who had never learned thus far to act for themselves, though they were always the main actors

through whose blind movements history was made. (Wolfe 1939: 298)

The indigenous figures are often depicted in the National Palace mural as both 'nameless', as Wolfe has observed, and faceless. In the Left Panel there are various ways in which the indigenous are represented as part of the indiscriminate 'masses' who are homogenised and reduced to types or symbols. In zone 9 the indigenous peoples of Mexico are depicted in different cameos as victims of labour inequality, violent political repression and religion respectively. The 'Indian' villages of Mexico were inevitably culturally diverse. As Florencia Mallon points out with reference to coalition armies in the Liberal Revolution of 1855, they 'were not seamless or undifferentiated [...]'. The villages were themselves political creations whose solidarity and unity were precariously articulated through as a process of communal hegemony' (1995: 312). This cultural pluralism is absent from the representation of indigenous peoples in zone 9.

Rivera's Eurocentric stance is not surprising considering his education at the San Carlos Academy followed by his fifteen-year apprenticeship in Europe, which I discussed in Chapter Three. His high-profile success was largely due his standing as an international artist. The European influence can be easily detected in the mural as part of his preferred vehicle for transmission of ideas.

Gleaning the Truth

One strong example of this Eurocentric tendency is clear in Rivera's image of the 'peasant trio' picking corn (fig. 5.12) which can be

compared to the figures of Jean-François Millet's *The Gleaners* (1857) (fig. 5.13), which was a typical depiction by peasant painters in nineteenth-century Europe. Similar images can be seen in paintings by van Gogh, Seurat and Renoir (Pollock 1977: 48). Two members of Rivera's group, depicted gathering corn are seen in profile and the man's face is entirely obscured by his hat which links him to the white-clothed peasants in straw yellow hats in zone 4 of the Central Panel. The peasants depicted in both representations are joined by an undulating line which unifies the group into an undifferentiated whole. The strong shading contrasting with light coloured clothing foregrounds the figures and gives them a sculptural solidity. The peasant figures are at once given prominence by being depicted at the start of the narrative curve and simplified into elliptic figures as the viewer can see mainly their backs. The social depiction of the 'Indian/peasant' appears to be given strong visibility in post-revolutionary Mexico, as was the case with Millet's French peasants. In reality, both pictures simultaneously distort the historical reality through a universalising representational reductionism. The comparison with Millet shows that the ethnicity and cultural specificity of Rivera's 'peasant/Indian' is eradicated as 'peasant' and Indian are fused into one and barely distinguishable from the European prototype.

It is true that Mexican *campesinos* did undertake such tasks as gleaning. Mari Elena Verduzco de Peña, lifelong resident of Ario de Rayón (formerly Ario Santa Mónica) testified in 1990, that in 'postrevolutionary Michoacán, social abandon at times took on an almost biblical cast as women trailed after reapers, gleaning spilled

and forgotten stalks of wheat' (Becker 1995: 1). This anecdotal observation, however, only represents one aspect of indigenous life. The family bent double over the single task of collecting leftover corn (gleaning) reduces 'the peasant' and 'Indian' to a one-dimensional social actor. In reality, 'the peasant' represents only one feature of identity in indigenous society. Bonfil Batalla describes the implications of this reductionism which eradicates other aspects of indigenous life outside the function of a labourer:

The mechanical transference of terms we customarily apply, such as "specialist" or "professional," forms an obstacle to understanding life in an indigenous community. The bonesetter does not cease being a peasant farmer and he may also be a musician. (Bonfil Batalla 2001: 35)

This misrepresentation through omission ignores important differences and has crucial social repercussions. The reductionism excludes celebratory dimensions of indigenous life and at the same time erases the specificity of different oppressions which may be defined by the indigenous themselves. Knight reminds us that this diminishment of the indigenous peoples of Mexico to one sole occupational function and the fused characterisation of Indian and peasant is part of Leftist rhetoric:

[...] the nineteenth century saw a progressive breakdown of the castelike, colonial order and its replacement by a society stratified by class. [...] Class now counted for more, but

caste-ethnic status was far from irrelevant. Indians were usually peasants but they were not peasants tout court as some on the Left have chosen to argue. Rather they were peasants who suffered a double oppression: their social class and Indian ethnicity against the 'carriers of the dominant culture' *mestizos* and creoles. (Knight 1990: 78)

One-Dimensional 'Indian'

This aesthetic and representational reductionism of aspects of indigenous culture results in a projected symbolic eradication in the public imagination. The representation of the Mexican peasant is distilled to the point of objectification and eradication of the diversity of indigenous identity. This depiction is entirely in keeping with the European's tendency to homogenise indigenous groups. This one-dimensional reduction reduces to the status of a stock commodified image of pastoral simplicity. The post-revolutionary trope of redeeming the indigenous by acculturation of those whose culture is supposedly absent, is applicable when juxtaposing this image with those later in this panel. The faceless figures are blanked-out as expressionless. It is as if they are a *tabula rasa* ready to be inscribed upon and given character through a process of enlightenment into Western ways. Like Rivera's Indians in the Central Panel they are mono-dimensional and, despite having a rich distant cultural heritage, as represented in the Right Panel, the contemporary Indians are defined solely by their working practices. Knight (1990) notes that, otherwise, this trope was reversed and Indians were seen as indolent avoiders of work. In another variation of this reductionism, the indigenous cultures of

Mexico were categorised with the descriptive label 'Indian' and 'largely subsumed within the larger notion of the rural folk' (Dawson 2001: 342).

In all the representations on the Left Panel there is a distinct absence of any positive aspects of the rich and varied cultural practices of distinct indigenous peoples. The 'Indian' is framed in the familiar trope of solely 'oppressed peoples', as if this aspect of indigenous life represented the whole picture. Work, whether oppressive or liberating, defines their entire characterisation. There is no representation, celebration or even recognition of indigenous culture contemporary to the post-revolutionary decades. This reinforces and consolidates the theme of 'the dying race'. Any indigenous practices that were not assimilated into the hegemonic culture of the Mexican modernising state were considered to be heading for extinction. In a curious adaptation of the Boasian anthropological model of cultural relativism, post-revolutionary racial reformists often linked the metaphor of 'pure race' with those who were not integrated into the modern state and 'without culture' (Dawson 2001: 341). Dawson refers to the example of Enrique Corona, the director of the Casa del Estudiante Indígena from 1926 until mid-1932 (2001: 335). According to Dawson, the function of the Casa was to create faithful sons of the Mexican Nation from 'pure Indian' examples:

Inside the Casa a culturally diverse student population, speaking mutually unintelligible languages, would be transformed into models of the national culture. They would

adopt modern dress and practices, learn perfect Spanish, and in turn bring the benefits of modernity into their home communities. (Dawson 2001: 329)

In the post-revolutionary period 1926-1932, this institution was 'hailed as the centrepiece of the government's commitment to Indian education' (Dawson, 2001: 329). The 'moral' component of post-revolutionary *indigenista* educational programmes was based on the social-Darwinist 'understanding' that the 'much larger rural community [... like the students in the Casa] was "without culture," and in need of similar types of socialization' (Dawson 2001: 342). In this instance their culture was erased entirely as the goal of the reform schools was to prove 'pure Indian' assimilability and ability to acquire 'civilised' culture. José Manuel Puig Casauranc (director of the SEP 1924-1928 and 1930-1931) outlined his intention for the Casa in 1932:

[...] we seek to generate a perfect cohesion of interests and sentiment among the distinct branches of the greater Mexican family. This will ultimately allow us to facilitate the formation of a true national soul. (Puig 1932 in Dawson 2001: 334)

In reality the aim of such a projected unity creating the 'national soul' in such post-revolutionary rhetoric reinforced a type of cultural colonisation by means of representational erasure of culturally-specific practices. Old colonial hierarchies were also reinforced through the presentation of a goal which erased indigenous words or symbols.

Their 'redeemed' future acculturation into the post-revolutionary Mexican Utopia was presented as if it was a certain outcome. It was an imaginary solution to a real problem resulting in a denial that left no room for intervention. The age-old 'Indian Problem' still existed but was ostensibly being dealt with in high-profile showcased educational projects. In effect the representation of indigenous peoples in the Left Panel reinforces over-simplification of 'Indian' culture through stereotyping and results in a concomitant deletion of cultural intricacy. The high-profile situation of the National Palace Mural served as a public consolidation of the collective 'solution' to the 'Indian Problem' which created a rhetoric of state-defined unity from a reality of uncontrollable diversity.

Various similar stereotypes are represented and consolidated in the representations of indigenous peoples in the Left Panel; these include: 'the natural rebel', 'the Conservative Catholic', 'the conquered victim', and 'the loyal sons of the Nation' (Dawson 1998). I will analyse Rivera's illustration of these types in the remainder of this chapter, as well as explaining the aesthetic, historical and theoretical aspects through which they are contextualised in the post-revolutionary narrative of teleological progress.

The narrative of revolutionary progress paradoxically equated the reason for its success as the wild, untameable rebel represented by the revolutionary and horse, whilst at once putting forward the ideal that this 'rebel' was to be tamed like the forces of nature. In Rivera's depiction of the three peasants in profile with three horses (fig 5.6), the dichotomy of civilisation/barbarism is recalled. This linkage between man and beast suggests that the peasant in this case is part of nature

and therefore below culture and ‘civilisation’. The horse has a double-coded, culturally specific meaning and often stands metonymically for the revolution. Rivera often depicted Zapata and horse together (fig. 5.14) in a seemingly inseparable unity. The symbolism of the horse in this instance contains a paradoxical logic at once elevating the agraristas to revolutionary icons whilst denigrating them as less than human and in need of civilising or taming. Bonfil Batalla states that the idea of ‘civilising’ the Indian is historically rooted and Eurocentric: “‘To civilize’ is a key expression. In Mexico, civilizing has always meant de-Indianising, imposing the ways of the West’ (Bonfil Batalla 2001: 105).

The Enlightened Path of ‘Rational’ Secularism

Dawson describes how *indigenistas* in the early post-revolutionary years ‘used a series of concepts to describe the process they wanted to promote’ (2004: 4). The deep continuity of post-revolutionary images of indigenous peoples were inherited from images that were ‘rooted in four centuries of colonial domination, and built on a series of polarities — the Christian versus the heathen, the *gente de razón* versus the savage, the masculine versus the feminine and culture versus nature’ (Dawson 2004: 4). Rivera’s depiction of the ‘Indian’ with arms outstretched on bended knee in ‘blind adulation’ and the subservient heads of the people putting money into church coffers links on a chain of signification to this idea of the inability to reason for oneself, hence being placed below culture. Being closer to nature is on a dichotomous polarity which presumes this means distance from ‘culture’, the definition of which is viewed in a Eurocentric light as synonymous

with Western 'rationality'. Mary Louise Pratt argues that such fusing of culture and nature reinforces the ideology of the 'inferior status' of the indigenous, as 'the more savage the nature, the more savage the culture' (1992: 133). This simplification and sub-civilized state indicating the need of reform is implicitly encoded in Rivera's representations of the peasant in zone 9. Each of the images reflects and reinforces the others as they exist on a semiotic chain as part of a hegemonic discourse. The web of signification is delineated by Western hegemonic rationality defined by Enlightenment secularism. The ideological foundations of this mindset have their roots in the Conquest (1519). The close soldering of the bond between religion and 'backwardness' as displayed in the mural can be traced back into Mexican liberal thought, the underlying presumption being that all religious forms are imposed from above on 'simple' folk who know no better. Further on in Mexican history during the Liberal *Reforma* in the 1850s, two main obstructions to the emergence of a secular, democratic society were seen as 'the enduring, isolated backwardness of the Indian peasantry' along with 'the wealth and influence of the Catholic Church' (Brading 1988: 76). Although this point of history precedes Charles Darwin's publication of *Origin of the Species* in 1859, it is firmly based in Evolutionary thought which creates a hierarchy between 'primitive' and 'advanced' societies. Post-revolutionary anti-clerical laws consolidated the trope of 'rational secularism/backward religion' and the heterogeneity of Mexican religious life was reduced to this dichotomy. This form of reductionism erases indigenous identities that do not subscribe to a 'progressive' redemption based on a hierarchical order.

Attacks on the Mural and Symbolic Violence

The symbolic ordering and collective vision of a Marxist utopia in the Left Panel can be viewed as a form of what Pierre Bourdieu would term 'symbolic violence':

Symbolic violence is the violence which extorts submission, which is not perceived as such, based on "collective explanations" or socially inculcated beliefs. (Bourdieu 1998: 103)

In 1935 a group of Catholic students attacked the Left Panel of the National Palace Mural. The mural was damaged but the targeted section, in which the clergy are shown extorting money from the Mexican poor using the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, was not destroyed (Wolfe 1939: 229). Wolfe explains the circumstances of this attack in which students sprayed acid on Rivera's National Palace Mural, 'failing to obliterate a section in which he suggested that the clergy employed the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe to get money from the Mexican poor' (1939: 229).

Rivera's Marxist viewpoint is underlined by his response to this assault on his work. The artist sees this as a testimony to success as the mural was attacked by Catholics whom he considers to be conservative capitalists:

Desde un punto de vista egoísta, el hecho me causó una amarga satisfacción, porque la acción de los capitalistas, asesinando una obra de arte, a pesar de la mancha de

vandalismo e incultura que el hecho haría caer sobre sus cabezas, prueba que el sentido revolucionario de la pintura era suficientemente fuerte, para que ellos prefieren asesinarlo. (Rivera quoted in Leblanc 1999 [1934]: 78)

The intended message of the mural is therefore explicitly Marxist. The religious dimensions of the Left Panel are ostensibly a straightforward Marxist critique of the links between the Catholic Church, fascism and capitalism. The implicit alleged emancipation of the 'Indian' in the narrative of the Left Panel, divides the indigenous peoples of Mexico into either an 'apolitical, atavistic dying race' or a 'progressive and politicised hence redeemable' ethnic group. To the post-revolutionary state:

[...] the conservative Catholic *campesino* remained a source of disdain, [and] the 'modernist' *campesino*, with Indian, *mestizo*, or mulatto heritage, emerged for the first time as a Mexican ideal. (Dawson 1998: 300)

In zone 6 of the Left Panel the Virgin of Guadalupe herself is the figure of worship who is being exploited by materialistic power-mongers as an icon to hypnotise the poor into subservient exploitation. Two priests with sardonic expressions stand before her representing the cynicism and hypocrisy of the Church. This scene is linked to the foundational architecture of dominance as the Basilica which houses her is joined to the building behind which also contains corrupt facets of capitalism. The horizontal lines which delineate the roofs of the

Basilica and the metal 'cage' construction link the two structures together. They are metonymically associated with the Capitalist base and superstructure which underpin Marxist ideology. The cell structures above are enclosing and incarcerating and these figures below are cramped underneath, as if the burden of capitalist structures weighs heavily upon them.

In this representation, Catholicism *per se* is linked with oppression when the apolitical Catholic *campesino* is distinguished from the modernised rational political actor above in zone 11. The peasants are feeding money into the machinery which houses the representatives of bourgeois corruption. The religious choices of 'uneducated', 'backward' peasants are seen to result from ignorant subservience as they are portrayed as unwitting dupes of the ideological forces of state Capitalism and its links with the Catholic Church. This reductionist image of direct association between Church officials and indigenous religious practice reinforces the 1930s *indigenista* dichotomy of 'rational' political 'Indian' and docile apolitical 'Indian' in need of redemption.

Sáenz 'believed that the communities of these regions lived a spiritual and religious life that made them distinctly non-Western', he also observed that they '[i]dentified with the soil, [and were] pantheistic and deeply spiritual' (Dawson 2004: 69). In 1936 he put forward the argument in 'Sobre la creación de un Departamento de Población Indígena' that '“above all we must recognize the Indian is an oriental, opposed in his view of the world to the European” ' (Sáenz quoted in Dawson 2004: 69).

He encouraged efforts to preserve religion, legends, arts, music, and all aspects of spiritual life, believing that “the religious problem will better be resolved through positive methods based in substitution of the new orientation, than through suppression and persecution.” Priests should be removed but temples left open, and Indians should not be impeded from celebrating their devotions. Rather than suppressing fiestas, Sáenz recommended an approach that would minimize excesses and promote cultural programs, propaganda, and expositions sponsored by the state. (Dawson 2004: 69)

Noting ‘that socialism was a type of religion, and that the Indian had communist vestiges in his religion, he believed that this effort was plausible’ (Dawson 2004: 69-70). This initiative to somehow draw out the ‘evolutionary potential’ of the ‘Indian’ and facilitate his ‘maturity’ into a Mexican citizen amounted to a paternalism which considered actual ‘Indian’ practices as dispensable.

Historical Mexican Paternalism and the ‘Infantile Indian’

Decision-making by the revolutionaries *for* the Mexican indigenous and their religious practice continues the paternalist project started by the religious orders during the conquest. The ‘Indians’ were seen as children who were incapable of making their own decisions. The Marxist view depicted by Rivera shows the ‘apolitical’ Mexican Catholic as somehow infantile due to lack of a political education provided by a ‘civilising modernity’. In the church congregation scene Rivera depicts

children with faceless 'Indians' in the same inward-looking crowd (fig. 5.7) hence linking the two as part and parcel of the same gullible, deluded flock. In reality there were attempts to impose both institutional State religion and secularism on the indigenous peoples of Mexico but neither of these hegemonic forms was received passively.

Similarly, attempted imposition of religious practices from above was a cornerstone of colonisation in Mexico. Although post-revolutionary educators inverted this imposition by imposing secularism, it was another non-Indian decision with consequences imposed by those who held hegemonic power:

[...] state officials informed campesinos that only those campesinos willing to forgo Catholicism would be eligible for plots of land, and the church reversed the injunction. Only those campesinos who refused governmental land and kept their children home from socialist schools could consider themselves upright Catholics. (Becker 1994: 123)

This top-down model robs the indigenous people of Mexico of spiritual autonomy. Bonfil Batalla reminds us of the diversity of Mexican religious practice:

Nominally, the majority of Mexican people profess to be Catholic. Nevertheless, it is apparent that their conceptions and rituals differ in many ways from the dogma and ritual of the Catholic Church. A "popular Catholicism" has been described, and the term "syncretism" has been used to refer

to popular Catholicism's mixture of Christian elements with those of diverse, but basically Mesoamerican, origins.

(Bonfil Batalla 2001: 137)

The Marxist understanding of 'the masses', consuming religion and slavishly following its authoritarian tenets underlies this church scene. This limited one-dimensional view does not take into account the indigenous religious syncretism which reappropriates and adapts Catholicism. This form of transculturation has existed since the attempt at a 'spiritual conquest' accompanied the violent physical Conquest. The 'spiritual conquest' was never fully accomplished largely due to indigenous appropriation of Catholicism and religious hybridity (Eakin 2002). In 1794 the preacher Fray Servando Teresa de Mier observed the fusing of elements of Christian and indigenous religions who 'worshipped God the father in the name of Tezcatlipoca, the Son as Huitzilopochtli; and venerated the Virgin Mary as Coatlicue' (Mier quoted in Carmichael and Sayer 1991: 39-40).

In the singular post-revolutionary situation many culturally-specific religious forms existed which were created by indigenous cultures. The experience of Catholicism in Mexico is complex and many-layered. Religious practice ranged from the institutional wealth and power by a land-owning Church which exploited the Mexican people to a diverse and complex religious syncretism which combined elements of Mesoamerican religion with Orthodox, institutionalised practice. These hybrid forms were empowering due to the creativity of and cultural ownership by indigenous peoples. Rivera's view can be criticised for again presenting a one-dimensional picture of indigenous

practice. Scheffler records the cultural multiplicity of the indigenous peoples of Mexico:

Actualmente en México se hablan más de 50 idiomas indígenas diferentes, los grupos de hablantes de estos idiomas, además de tener una lengua en común que los identifica y los caracteriza, conservan su indumentaria particular, sus creencias, sus tradiciones y su forma de ser, situación que les imprime una singularidad y conforma al país como un colorido y variado mosaico cultural. (2002: 14)

While Rivera depicts only one element of the religious practices of indigenous peoples in the National Palace Mural, the corruption of institutional religion and oppressed peasants in zone 9 links Calles with the Catholic Church which in reality he despised. A brief look at some of the milestones in the history of Catholicism will serve to illustrate some of the complexities of religious practice in Mexico.

Mexican Catholicism is multifaceted and has its roots in both the conquest and colonisation of indigenous communities and prehispanic religious practices. Laws restricting the wealth and privileges, or *fueros*, of the institution of the Catholic Church date back to *La Reforma* (1855-1876). During the Calles presidency and the *Maximato*, the *Cristero* conflict which, as mentioned in Chapter Three, was a reaction to the enforcement and expansion of the religious restrictions enshrined in the 1917 Constitution. Article 24 prohibited public worship outside church buildings, Article 27 restricted the Church's ownership of property, and the secular education in schools was

mandated by Article 3. Calles was a teacher from Sonora, a modernised state who had no room for 'Old Mexico' in the centre of the country. Williamson (1992) points out that the Catholic peasantry were outraged by the government's attempt to enforce state education over religious education, he also states that many did not question the Catholic orthodoxy. Rivera depicts the 'masses' politicised by Marxist education as active and the Catholic peasant as passive. In reality the Catholic practices of the peasants were often fiercely defended by themselves.

The flag of the *Cristero* forces whose slogan was 'Viva Cristo Rey' (long live Christ the King) is depicted in zone 9 on the right of the Virgin of Guadalupe (fig. 5.8). The resolution of the *Cristero* conflict involved the mediation of the United States and ambassador Morrow. As I described earlier, in the midst of the church congregation, just above Frida Kahlo, Rivera portrays the figure of Morrow who was appointed American ambassador in late 1927. He arrived in Mexico when US-Mexican relations were very strained due to Calles' war on the Catholic Church and his renewed assault on foreign oil interests. Ambassador Morrow's empathy, ingenuity and ability to communicate in Spanish made him an excellent choice for mediating conflict.⁵⁹ A friendship developed between Calles and Morrow which improved US relations (Alba 1973: 168). Discussions between the government and Morrow lasted for two years, until the *Arreglos* (Arrangements) were

⁵⁹ Wolfe notes how Dwight W. Morrow's commissioning of Rivera's Cuernavaca mural in 1929 was largely a tactic to '[ingratiate] himself and promote goodwill by commissioning a mural in the town in which he now resided. Really this was a corrective afterthought, for Morrow had begun impulsively by helping a curate to restore his chapel, which was falling into disrepair. Then he realized that the move was tactless in view of the sharp conflict in progress between Church and State' (Wolfe 1939: 307).

signed in September 1929. The church called for a suspension of the armed conflict and the government agreed not to enforce Calles' extension of the anticlerical articles 3, 25 and 27 of the 1917 Constitution (Kirkwood 2000: 164). The placing of Morrow with Frida and Cristina Kahlo in the congregation, poised with a similar profile to these 'educators' suggests that he too, as the member of a 'sophisticated' Western nation is outward-looking and progressive rather than inward-looking and provincial.

Nuestra Señora

Rivera's small portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe (figs. 5.1 and 5.8) amongst the larger structures of oppression diminishes the reality of her importance to the indigenous peoples of Mexico. The towering iconic representation of the patriarchal figure of Marx in zone 11 obscures her comparatively minute representation, thus minimising her significance. Here Rivera links the United States flag with that representing the forces of Cristo Rey, clearly linking the Catholic Church to foreign capital.

The ideological component of this representation is in reality not so straightforwardly unidirectional from the 'top down'. The Virgin of Guadalupe has been utilised in Mexico as a symbol of both creole political resistance to aspects of colonialism and indigenous syncretism.

Rivera's projected image of fundamental secularism does not represent the value systems and beliefs of many indigenous peoples. Although Rivera intended to champion the indigenous cause his socio-psychical make-up was embroiled in Marxist thought of the time

combined with certain strands of the racial theories specific to Mexico and can be seen to be linked to what Aguirre Beltrán has termed 'leftist Westernism', which 'is the belief that the Indians are merely peasants, suffering the common oppression of peasants, therefore deserving no special discriminatory treatment: "The vindication of the Indian fits into the general framework of the economic liberation of the proletarian masses"' (Beltrán quoted in Knight 1990: 81). Beltrán goes on to note that 'this position *in practice* stood pretty close to revolutionary *indigenismo*; in certain cases, like that of President Lázaro Cárdenas, reformers tended to oscillate between the two' (Knight 1990: 81).

The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is weakened in Rivera's portrayal, as she is seen as connected to oppression and Capitalist exploitation. In reality, the Virgin of Guadalupe one of the most powerful forces in Mexican history, is an integral part of religious syncretism. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe has been deployed by many indigenous Mexican people and is described as '[t]he best documented example of this syncretism' which has existed since 1531 (Carmichael and Sayer 1991: 40). The goddess Tonantzin was identified with the Virgin Mary as a joint manifestation. In an apparition at the site of Tonantzin's temple, the dark-skinned Virgin of Guadalupe was seen by the 'Indian' Juan Diego. The vision appeared just north of Mexico City, at Tepeyac, the place of an 'Indian' shrine to Tonantzin, a major Aztec divinity (Rowe and Schelling 1991: 40).

The Virgin of Guadalupe became the patron saint of all Mexico and is still venerated today.⁶⁰ In some Indian villages the Virgin is still referred to as Tonantzin (Masden in Carmichael and Sayer 1991: 40-41). This durable pedigree which links her to Aztec Goddesses qualifies the Virgin of Guadalupe to be considered as a sustained and powerful influence in Mexican culture, not simply an instrument to manipulate the masses through a capitalist discourse. The worship of the goddess/saint is an example of syncretism which shows that '[t]his framework is not nor has it ever been immutable. It changes and is restructured over time, especially when it is the patrimony of oppressed groups' (Bonfil Batalla 2001: 136).

Images of the Virgin of Guadalupe have been deployed for divergent purposes. Visions were a major device for the acculturation of the indigenous by Colonial hegemonic versions of reality but they can also act as the opposite as indigenous belief systems appropriate their own visions as counter-hegemony. The Virgin's 'shrine was to become the most significant icon of emergent Mexican nationalism', nevertheless '[d]oubts about the direction of the process of colonial penetration or native appropriation form an early part of the history of the Virgin of Guadalupe' (Rowe and Schelling, 1991: 23). Juan Diego's vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe provided a way for Indians to continue to worship at Tepeyac and this can be seen as an early form of resistance to the spiritual conquest of Mexico. Bernardino de Sahagún, complained that

⁶⁰ Elena Avila a present day Mexican Curandera who blends Aztec and Christian healing techniques explains the manifestation of the Virgin as a feminine healing force: 'The middle panel of my altar bears the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. To me, she represents two worlds coming together, the struggle of my people, the mestizos, to merge both Christian and Indian beliefs into one. I also see her as a symbol of heaven and earth combined. She is the Virgin Mary, feminine energy, the mediator who can take my client's petitions straight to God' (Avila 2000: 136).

the 'cult' of Guadalupe allowed the Indians a ploy for idolatry. He complained that:

[...] prior to the Spanish conquest they had come on pilgrimage from afar to worship Tonantzin, the mother of the gods, at her temple in Tepeyac, and continued to arrive at the Christian chapel to pray to that goddess since in Nahuatl the Virgin was also addressed as Tonantzin.
(Brading 2001:2)

Universal Civilisation, 'Backward' Religion

Rivera's depiction of the 'backwardness' of the apolitical peasant is another form of the categorising which was prevalent in post-revolutionary intellectual discourse produced by professional 'experts' and 'intellectuals'. The classifying of Mexican religions often placed 'pagan' practices as the least civilised. The idea that civilisation was 'universal' contradicted the understandings of Boasian cultural relativism and is once more reminiscent of social-Darwinist models such as those of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919). In *Forjando Patria* (1916), Manuel Gamio distinguished 'tres clases de católicos: los católico-paganos, los verdaderos católicos y los católicos utilitarios' (Gamio, 1982 [1916]: 89). As the first professional Mexican anthropologist and founding father of post-revolutionary *indigenismo*, Gamio's work was regarded as highly influential in policy-making. His attitude to the syncretism practised by those described as 'los católico-paganos' is that of a pioneering modernist and Mexican nationalist. The 'Indian' in this category is

described as in need of educating out of his/her backward ways into the enlightened path of universal civilisation, which is in fact the path of Western modernism which is described as universal:

Aunque forman mayoría, constituyen social e intelectualmente el elemento inferior, el que requiere veinte, cincuenta o más años para adquirir la religión, el idioma y la cultura que les son indispensables para poder incorporarse a la civilización contemporánea universal.
(Gamio 1982 [1916]: 89)

In a similar gesture, in which the indigenous peoples of Mexico should be made to understand the universal civilising effects of Marxism, Rivera presents this as the way forward (fig. 5.25). Indigenous communities themselves were often not so pliable when it came to being converted into the new religion of post-revolutionary nationalism. The reality in terms of worship was far from the passivity depicted by Rivera. When 'Sáenz and his cohort [of...] self-confident missionaries of the Mexican state' entered rural Carapan in 1932 'carrying with them the expertise needed to interpret the social conditions they found and designed a program to save the Indian', they were quickly 'disillusioned, frightened and confused' by the violent response they received (Dawson 2004: 31). The gulf between *indigenista* theory and practice is highlighted by the fact that Sáenz was 'flabbergasted' to hear the strong resistance of crowds chanting 'Viva Cristo Rey!' and 'We don't want to change, we are ignorant and

we want to remain ignorant! [...] Who are you to advise us?' (Dawson 2004: 31).

Spiritually Conquered?

As I have demonstrated, this oversimplification depicting blind adulation can lead to generalised assumptions about the diverse reality of Mexican religious beliefs. On the one hand, it is important to note the fact that institutionalised Catholicism was a crucial aspect of Spanish colonial domination, as we have seen depicted historically in the Central Panel. Lomnitz adds that during the first years of Mexican Independence, the 'nationalization of the church can be partially understood as an extension of the appropriation of the faith that was the ideological cornerstone of Spanish imperialism' (Lomnitz 2001: 47). In her study of post-revolutionary Michoacán, Becker explains that 'many Cardenistas stumbled—without fully appreciating their clumsiness—onto a peasantry trained in a very specific form of Catholicism' (1995: 9). She goes on to describe this formation as 'a symbolic system largely based on gender that called for a self-denial that the priests referred to as purity' (1995: 9). Becker again stresses the conservatism of Catholic practices, stating that 'Catholic elites had developed a symbolic system that depended on an understanding and acceptance both of women's actual abnegation and that abnegation as a metaphor designed to restrain the potential nonconformity of Indians, peasants, workers and all subordinate groups' (1995:9). On the other hand, the hegemonic colonial deployment of institutional Catholic dogma albeit highly significant, is only one facet of a complex set of varied practices. It is important to note that the symbol of the Virgin of

Guadalupe is not straightforwardly 'national' as its origins are based on the vision of an 'Indian' prior to the formation of national identity; the viewpoints of indigenous groups were generally distorted or misunderstood when represented externally to their culture.

The religious worship of figures such as the Virgin of Guadalupe and other formulations of religious syncretism are for many indigenous peoples a counter-hegemonic form of social identity. Bonfil Batalla makes the point that 'the presence of cultural elements of foreign origin does not in itself indicate weakness or loss of authenticity within Indian cultures' (Bonfil Batalla 2001: 136). He goes on to argue that the appropriation and blending of religion may create a situation in which oppressed groups are empowered by their own meanings rather than dominated by the intended hegemonic version of Church doctrine:

Thus, the so-called syncretism may be understood not as an indiscriminate amalgam of elements from different backgrounds, a sort of devotional collage, but, rather, as the product of a complex process of appropriation. Diverse 'Indian' societies have taken the signs, symbols, and practices of the imposed religion and made them their own by reorganizing them and reinterpreting them within the core of their own religious beliefs. (Bonfil Batalla 2001: 136)

The appropriation of Catholic tropes and their reworking into new amalgamated forms of indigenous culture, created what Claude Lévi-Strauss has termed *bricolage* which must be acknowledged in order to reflect the complexity of Mexican religious syncretism. The image of

the Virgin of Guadalupe is particularly potent in this context and it could be argued from outside the paradigm of 'leftist Westernism' that she represents a religious choice for the Mexican people not one imposed from outside. Rowe and Schelling state that '[n]ative visions of the Christian supernatural which above all took the form of the appearance of the Virgin Mary, began to occur in Mexico very soon after the conquest' (Rowe and Schelling 1991: 23). Rivera's depiction of the Virgin of Guadalupe is overshadowed by the building in (fig. 5.8) and the image of the prostitute with legs straddled over the basilica above her (fig. 5.20), depicted in the conventional patriarchal trope, representing vice. This representation reinforces one aspect of Catholicism but her complex and diverse role within Mexican society is minimised and secularised as she is swamped by various icons of corrupted power.

Hennessey points out that the effects of modernisation can lead to a hegemonic suffocation of strands which contradict the dominant discursive paradigm:

Ancient folkways have to be harnessed to the needs of the modernizing State, but in the process may be secularized and destroyed. Cynical revolutionaries will not care, but for those with a sincere interest in preserving indigenous ways, means must be found to protect them from the effects of modernization. (Hennessey 1991: 682-683)

Rivera's representations of the indigenous peoples of Mexico in zone 9 depict passive 'Indians'. The theme of the powerless being a

blank page on which the powerful inscribe their culture is paradoxically unwittingly projected by the artist who intended to champion the 'Indian'. Rivera's peasants in zone 9 are either oppressed by Western institutions or redeemed by Western political models, either way they are powerless. However, the religious scene depicted in the Left Panel shows only one aspect of Rivera's stance on Catholicism. In *Mexico of Today and in the Future* the powerful symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe is exploited again by the powerful Marxist system. This time it is an inversion of her power which is used to symbolise the Catholic Church and 'oppressive forces' of Capitalism.

'Empowering' Education

Gutiérrez emphasises the multi-dimensional debate surrounding state education and the dialectical interplay of forces in historically-specific hegemonic dynamics:

Each educational system possesses its own complexity, manifested in antagonistic ideologies and the contest between opposing forces operating within the society, such as that between the secular state and the church and between state agencies and the unions. (1999: 56)

In the following section I analyse one dimension of the multi-layered question of the benefits and pitfalls of Mexican state education. I consider the strand of post-revolutionary pedagogic theory which is deeply embedded in the idea of 'redeeming' the 'Indian'.

Rivera's placing of the image of Frida and Cristina as the forward-looking educators in the church congregation (fig. 5.15), graphically shows the links between religion and post-revolutionary education in Mexico. Morrow, Cristina and her children are staring out of the fresco and the viewer can interact with them from the balcony by meeting their upward gaze. Frida places her hand protectively on the shoulder of the darker-skinned boy who is reading from a bible as if to physically turn and guide him her way. As Guillermo Palacios explains the rural teachers and 'intellectual pedagogues' were amongst 'the elite post-revolutionary groups most involved' in the creation of 'new social categories' (1998: 309). Gutiérrez observes that 'the fundamental premise of Mexican education reflects a universal concern: to unify the population, to create citizens, and to prepare a labor force in response to economic development' (1999: 56).

Knight describes how education was a key part of a wider social programme through which the institutionalisation of the post-revolutionary centralised nucleus of political power was secured:

During the 1920s and '30s, therefore, the state consolidated itself on the basis of new institutions: the labour unions and confederations; the Federal school system and the SEP (Ministry of Education); the ejido (the agrarian reform community); and, after 1929, the official party (PNR, later PRM [1938-46] and PRI [since 1946]). These were decisive changes, largely lacking Porfirian precedent and constitutive of a politico-social revolution. (2002: 5)

This post-revolutionary educating vision was another ‘top down’ model, although some attempts were made to incorporate grass-roots ideas and indigenous cultures. Rivera’s depicts a transformation of the *campesino* by showing how the worker changes from oppressed rural labourer in zone 9 to ‘enlightened’ revolutionary brother in zone 11. The oppressed figures in the earlier part of the narrative are bent double with work or hang their heads subserviently, whereas the ‘awakened’ workers stand tall and wear satisfied smiles

Rural Teachers and ‘Indian’ Integration

The rural teacher was a key element in this process of ‘transformation’ and a person in whom ‘civilisation’ could be embodied, as the supposed ‘missionaries of culture’ lead the rural ‘Indian’ worker out of pre-revolutionary ‘squalor’ into the promise of modernisation. This representation of change of the rural masses and leadership by the enlightened elite was an integral component in the construction of the new revolutionary social conscience. This process is described by Palacios ‘as a foundation for shaping the antithetical self-representation of the rural teacher, whose mission it was to create the ‘new *campesino*’ – as if one were the synonym of the old regime and the other of the revolution’ (1998: 310).

Florencia Mallon observes that there were ‘reverberations between nineteenth-century liberal discourse’ and post-revolutionary educational policy (1994: 81). Along with other commentators she contends that state programmes displayed contradictory effects during the 1920s and 1930s as they had the simultaneous goals of enabling rural populations, integrating them into the national society and

economy and ‘the less laudatory goals of social control’ (1994: 81). She also notes that the response of local communities was variable, ranging from welcoming the attempts to ‘redeem’ local life through to resistances such as absenteeism, assassination of teachers and the *Cristero* rebellion in the 1920s (1994: 81). Knight corroborates this view:

The rural school, however, became a center not only of education (neutrally defined), but also of technological diffusion, agrarian reform, political mobilization and nationalist propaganda. The *maestro rural*, acting, like his French Republican counterpart, as the front-line soldier of the secular state, was expected to counter the influence of the church and to stimulate sentiments of patriotism, to inculcate, as one study puts it, “the new ‘religion’ of the country—post-revolutionary nationalism”. (Knight 1990: 82)

The symbol of the rural school teacher (fig. 5.16) from Rivera’s Ministry of Education frescoes, is described by Tibol ‘as a signal image for programmatic reconstruction during this crucial phase of the revolutionary process’ (Tibol quoted in Craven 2002: 40). She describes the education programme of the 1920s and 1930s as radical and it included the active participation of women. The schoolteachers were often the peasants’ only support in insisting on the implementation of land reform and consequently over two hundred of them were shot by the large landowners’ hired *pistoleros* (Cockcroft in Craven 2002: 40). Vasconcelos was Obregón’s Minister of Education

between 1920 and 1924, as discussed in Chapter One. He was the driving force behind educational reform and ‘instigated a government campaign to integrate the Indian and mestizo into the national culture’ (Williamson 1992: 329). Vasconcelos had sent teachers out to improve literacy in rural areas⁶¹ and initiated a programme of reform which included the building of schools and libraries as well as official investment in indigenous arts and crafts. Calles’s Minister of Education, Moisés Sáenz continued to expand rural education and replace church schools with government schools which emphasised vocational training. There were some important attempts made to improve services to indigenous cultures. For example under Cárdenas, educational reform included sex education and a socialist programme which was apparently a genuine attempt to include the indigenous peoples of Mexico in the Nation state (Dawson 2004; Kirkwood 2000). Dawson (1998; 2001; 2004), however, records how, faced with the complex reality of a wide variety of communities with diverse cultural and economic needs, these rural programmes were frequently spoilt by corrupt management and under-funded, teachers were often poorly trained and culturally supercilious. The benefits often came at a high price in terms of the imposition of certain forms of cultural Capital which favoured all things Western with the exception of the folkloric valuation of indigenous artefacts:

⁶¹ ‘Despite significant school construction, illiteracy levels revealed that the educational programmes left much to be desired. In 1921 illiteracy levels hovered at 71 percent; by 1932 they had been reduced to only 62 percent’ (Kirkwood 2000: 158).

[...] la Escuela Rural funciona sólo como parte integrante del complejo de la cultura occidental; es imposible que subsista o funcione normalmente, con sus métodos, en las comunidades indígenas netas. (Aguirre Beltrán y Pozas Arciniega 1991: 216)

Nothing to Lose?

As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*:

The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE! (Marx and Engels 1967 [1848]:120)

In the case of Mexico, the idea that the population can be simplified into the two camps of proletariat and bourgeoisie subsumes the reality of many cultures under the umbrella term of 'classes'. This reductionism amounts to cultural eradication for indigenous people since race and ethnicity, as well as gender differences, are treated as if they have no worth or significance. A radical self-reflexivity is necessary to understand the contradictions within the Marxist premise of dividing the social order into bourgeoisie and proletariat. Rivera's attempt to fuse the *mestizo* with the universalising tenets of Marxism is underpinned by a form of essentialism which sees society solely in terms of class. The idea that indigenous peoples have no culture worthy of preservation or autonomous development ignores diversity and cultural-specificity. The idea of indigenous peoples being 'without

culture' resonates with the Marxist notion that they 'have nothing to lose'. The linking of the national symbol of the *mestizo* with peasant and worker as the embodiment of hope and progress is historically contingent and links with the Cardenista phase of the Mexican nationalising project and its corollary of the redeemable 'Indian'.

[...] Mexican governmental ideologues have offered up a myth of secular redemption [...] Cardenistas drew on a variety of techniques to convey this mythology. They constructed a revolutionary iconography, an official literature, and an official art. (Becker 1995: 1)

Rivera uses a Marxist model of liberation to point the way forward for the redemption of backward, 'apolitical' ways of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. As a student of Marx clutches *El Capital* (fig. 5.11) he points towards the figures above where Rivera satirizes the pillars of capitalism. Rivera relies on the symbol of the *mestizo* to amalgamate the races of Mexico, yet all are subsumed under the leadership of a universal 'world literature', which supersedes all local cultural products, including those of the indigenous peoples of Mexico:

National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. (Marx and Engels 1967 [1848]: 80)

The book symbolises learning and the cultural capital attributed to literacy and political understanding. Other forms of conveying culture and philosophy are therefore superseded by this privileged form. Oral culture is often the preferred mode of indigenous cultures which believe in the power of the 'spoken' word. Similarly the rich heritage of cultural transmission of indigenous myths and legends is marginalised and relegated to the realms of superstition or 'folk culture'. Here Rivera equates literacy with progress, thus implicitly denying the value of such other forms of cultural transmission. This is strongly resonant with the precept of Mexican nationalism, which counters United States intervention.

In this section of the mural, Rivera secularises the sacred in a Marxist discourse substituting religious symbols with Marxist iconography. He begins with the book *El Capital* itself representing the 'word' of Marxism and the worker representing the 'masses' or common man. Moving on in zone 11 we will discuss the hammer and sickle and Marx himself as symbols of the sacred secularism of Marxism.

In a predominantly Catholic country, this powerful symbolism highlights some of the incongruities between the so-called traditional backwardness and modern ideas of progress. Hennessy reminds us that 'Mexico provides a particularly interesting case of intellectuals faced with the dilemmas of reconciling the traditional with the new and the sacred with the secular' (1991: 683).

In reality zone 9 is inextricably interlinked with zone 10 where Rivera explicitly depicts President Calles at the head of those conducting the forces of capitalism. Rivera links these demagogues

symbolically as part of the machinery which is directly responsible for repression of strikers. Rivera uses the device of placing the defeated peoples below the President to indicate the subjugation of labour forces under Calles's rule (fig. 5.1). He depicts the portrait of workers talking to each other to emphasise the dialogic qualities of the mural. The worker holding *El Capital* wears a happy expression, content to be in conversation and above the turmoil of the lower portion of zone 9. The post-revolutionary political situation was lead largely by the Sonoran forces who championed a secularising modernity. In zone 10 Calles is portrayed as corrupt and decadent and part of the ugly machinery of Capitalist oppression:

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. (Marx and Engels 1967 [1848]: 80)

In the interface between zone 9 and zone 10 (fig. 5.20), Rivera illustrates this Manichean model of class antagonism by literally depicting two distinct classes juxtaposed with each other, a vision which is directly linked to the model outlined by Marx and Engels above.

Zone 10: The Cage of Consolidation

The five compartments constructed of metal box frames make up zone 10 (fig. 5.17). These cells containing facets of bourgeois decadence are painted above the suffering workers and 'apolitical peasants' depicted in zone 9. The boxes contain different depictions of the deadly sins of decadence: lust, greed and corrupted power. The interface between these two areas is marked by the two smiling workers at the far left edge of these square containers who clutch *El Capital* and two men in suits reading a paper together. One man wears a bowler hat the other a trilby. In the cubicle directly above this scene are the profiles of two rows of young people whose faces have a variety of different skin tones. Opposite these faces stands a man pointing upwards.

The first of these cubicles in Rivera's narrative is to be found in the scene behind the workers (fig. 5.18). Here multi-racial students are being lectured to under a banner displaying the motto chosen by Vasconcelos for the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM): 'POR MI RAZA HABLARA EL ESPIRITU' (Knight 1990: 92). Under this banner is a plaque reading 'SOCIALISMO NACIONAL MEXICANO' and another swastika symbol.

Tibol explains that the lecturer in this mural is associated with Vasconcelos himself who was once a rector of the university: '[...] un ex-rector de la Universidad enseña a los pobres estudiantes las doctrinas del socialismo mexicano' (1999 [1935]: 101-102). Rivera has distorted the features of this teacher through a derogatory caricature and explicitly suggested a connection to right-wing politics by showing him pointing a finger to a sign labelled National Socialism which was the official name for the German Nazi Party (*National Socialist German*

Workers Party, or NSDAP) and the policies it adopted as the government of Germany (1933–1945).

In the box above, to the right of this scene depicting education, are a group of men huddled round a model which is spilling out tickertape on which arrows are inscribed; one points to the left reading '*moneda falsa*' (false money) the other arrow to the right reading '*moneda buena*' (good money) (fig.5.19). Above these men in suits is a gold-coloured sign comprised of a dollar symbol and another swastika. This cubicle contains powerful capitalists and encloses those who were notorious for their corrupt methods and financial intervention in Mexican affairs. The figures, from right to left, are John D. Rockefeller, Harry Sinclair, William Durant, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and Andrew Mellon.⁶²

Rivera caricatures these beady-eyed figures as cynical, miserly and mesmerised by the capital symbolised by the New York Stock Exchange. The eyes of each man in this group are either squinting or shielded from the viewer with pale spectacles, which accentuate the lack of expression in their faces and strongly contrast with the open faces of peasants depicted below in the composition (fig. 5.6). The wide-eyed innocence of these contrasting, darker-faced figures

⁶² Harry Sinclair was an oil magnate and part of a sensational scandal during the Harding administration involving the Secretary of the Interior, Albert B. Fall and the leasing of government oil lands for private interests (Jones 1983: 436). Cornelius Vanderbilt, 'the cynical, crude and farsighted New Yorker' known as 'Commodore' Vanderbilt was a wealthy ship owner who turned in later life to railroads and manipulated stock for his own benefit (Jones 1983: 302). Andrew Mellon, Secretary of the Treasury during the Harding and Coolidge administrations persuaded Congress in 1926 to make drastic reductions in taxation. Justified as a means for releasing funds for productive investment, they may have stimulated the stock-market speculation that preceded the 1929 Wall Street Crash (Jones 1983: 444).

underlies the infantilised status of the disempowered Mexican. The attire of the suited men is encoded with civilisation and sophistication.

Underneath the capitalists, another cell contains a corrupt priest and a prostitute (fig. 5.20). This scene is one of alienated relationships and cynical debauchery. A general queues behind the prostitute with money waiting to pay for her services.

Further to the right, a cell contains President Calles flanked by two figures in profile (fig 5.23). The body language and proximity of this trinity indicates a level of intimacy between them. The *jefe máximo* is pointing to a piece of paper and the other two characters hand's are close to his. The square-jawed figure to the left wears a high ranking military uniform and has his finger poised over a button. The tonsured, ape-faced personality on the right wears the purple cloak of an Archbishop. As Rafael Carrillo Azpeitia explains the military bureaucrat is inspired by General Pablo González ⁶³ , and the religious figure by Pascual Díaz y Barreto (1876-1936), who was Archbishop of Mexico between 1929 and 1936 (1987: 83). The bestial features of these three figures represent the combined inhumanity of the Military, the State and the Church.

Below the crooked power brokers, another cell contains a man looking into a microscope and other smartly dressed figures amongst whom are two women who appear to be taking notes from another suited man (fig. 5.23). This group represents members of the bourgeois press and scientific investigation in the interests of capital. They are

⁶³ Zapata was assassinated in 1919 by Jesus Guajardo acting under orders from General Pablo González.

trapped within the same prison-like structure as the other bastions of capitalism in isolated cells of the structure.

Class, Classes and ‘The Pillars of Society’

Zone 10 shows bourgeois institutions connecting President Calles, international finance and national exploitation religious hypocrisy and elitist education. As discussed in relation to zone 9, education was a key theme of post-revolutionary rhetoric. Rivera clearly distinguishes between bourgeois education and Marxist political education, the latter being associated with liberation of the worker and the former connected to privilege and corruption. However, the motivation behind Rivera’s lampooning of the University may be double-edged, as he was expelled from his position as director of UNAM’s *Escuela de Artes Plásticas* in 1930. Later in the same year, in an article in *El Nacional Revolucionario* on 26th May, he denounced this institution as reactionary:

La Universidad se ha desenmascarado; a nadie puede caber la duda de su posición de clase contra los trabajadores, por su propia confesión se ha denunciado ella misma. (Rivera 1999 [1930]: 53)

The portrayal of the garish features of the ex-rector acts as a symbol which Rivera uses to critique the elitism of the institution from which he had just been expelled. Rivera depicts his finger pointing to the centre of a sign reading ‘SOCIALISMO NACIONAL MEXICANO’. This is a direct reference to fascist political models which Rivera had

experienced first hand in his recent visit to Germany and which he had recently explicitly critiqued in his fresco series *Portrait of America* (1933) at the New Workers' School New York.

This critique is also of Vasconcelos and selective education and must be viewed in context with other educational developments of the time. Vasconcelos's mission was to produce a spiritual rebirth by leading the Mexican people through education and political action. He believed that schooling should be accessible to all sectors of society. The racial aspect was pivotal to Vasconcelos's philosophy as I discussed in Chapter One.

In zone 9, as I have shown, the projection of an image of 'empowerment' via Marxist education, symbolised by the worker holding *El Capital* and the inter-textual reference to the rural school teacher, are presented by Rivera as 'superior' and progressive forms of education. He clearly announced that at UNAM he was an outspoken voice on the side of the Proletariat:

Yo era dentro de ella una voz y un voto de la ideología de
clase de los obreros y los campesinos y por eso estorbaba yo
allí. (Rivera 1999 [1930]: 53)

In zone 9 of the Left Panel, Rivera depicts a pedagogical model leading the 'worker' (a label which subsumes the 'Indian') out of the darkness of oppression and into the enlightenment of political consciousness. The juxtaposition of these different forms of education: the one through which the 'Indian' is 'redeemed', and the other exclusive, elitist education, which Rivera represents as characteristic

of UNAM, serves to exacerbate the class differences between the students. This has the effect of reinforcing the dichotomy of bourgeois and proletariat. The 'empowered' *mestizo* worker clutching Marx's texts points mockingly at the university students (fig. 5.11). He is depicted as a rational, autonomous political actor and hence the agent of change, whilst conversely the university students passively absorb the indoctrination which is being dictated to them. The conformist compliance of the students is suggested by their static uniform rows, and fixed gaze. The men in bowler hats below them are presumably reading the biased news of the bourgeois press. The suits, smart haircuts and white-collars of the students and paper-readers are encoded with class symbolism which contrasts with the workers' overalls and the simple clothing of the working classes. One of these workers, holding *El Capital* wears a suit-like jacket. This partial formality emphasises his working class status.

The 'Mexican Arts Association'

In reality, Rivera's relationship with North American financiers was not quite the diametrical opposition implied by the satirical portraits of Rockefeller, Sinclair, Durant, Vanderbilt, and Mellon in zone 10. Some of these United States capitalists understood the benefits of promoting an image of good relations with Mexico's cultural vanguard. The 'Mexican Arts Association' was formed in December 1930 at the home of John D. Rockefeller Junior. The founding committee was comprised of members of the world of finance or the spheres of art and culture connected to finance. The organization intended to 'promote friendship between the people of Mexico and the United States of America by

encouraging cultural relations and the interchange of fine and applied arts' (Wolfe 1939: 333). In 1939 Wolfe wrote:

The dominant art family in America is undoubtedly that of the Rockefellers: they may not compete with the older Morgans and Mellons in Old Masters, but they surely predominate in the purchase and fostering of the work of living artists. (Wolfe 1939: 334)

The relationship between US capital and Mexican oil, represented by the financiers in zone 10, was also highly topical at the time the National Palace Mural was painted, due to implementation of relevant articles of the 1917 Constitution.

Rivera was in the United States for the three years preceding the creation of *Mexico of Today and in the Future*. He had embarked for the United States in November 1930 and the prospect of painting in this 'truly industrial' country was exciting as the artist had 'originally envisioned [it] as the ideal place for modern mural art' (Rivera 1991: 105). In 1931 Rivera was invited to paint various works in America by the Mexican Art Association. His first American murals were *Allegory of California* (1931) in the Luncheon Club of the San Francisco, Pacific Stock Exchange and *The Making of a Fresco*, Showing the Building of a City (1931) in the California School of Fine Arts. According to Anthony Lee:

[Rivera's] first two San Francisco murals provided stunning visual evidence of a symbolic language of radical political

dissent. Painters and critics saw them as models for emulation and refusal by turns, picking up some of their features and considering them in relation to new arguments about ethnic minorities and the working classes. (Lee 1999: XIX)

African-American modernists were particularly influenced by Rivera's work (Lefalle-Collins 1996). Between May 1932 and March 1933 Rivera painted *Detroit Industry* at the Detroit Institute of Arts, as I discussed in Chapter Four. In March 1933 Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in the United States introducing the innovative New Deal with the aim of saving American capitalism. The New Deal's initial Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) began in 1933. This scheme channelled emergency relief funds to a number of artists who in general produced uncontroversial works (Lee 1999: 129). The experience of North America helped to shape the style and subject of this Left Panel. As Bertram Wolfe reminds us:

Indeed this last wall was completed after he had done the belt conveyers of Detroit and the class-struggle panels of the New Workers School, shows the influence of both of them and is the distillation of all that he has learned and seen and felt in the course of the years spent in industrial America. (Wolfe 1939: 301)

The Left Panel was begun soon after Rivera had returned from painting his movable fresco series containing an explicit critique of

fascism entitled *Portrait of America* (1933) in the New Workers' School on West 24th Street, New York (see fig. 5.30). The history of America is depicted as part of a world-wide historical movement leading to the future development of what Rivera viewed as the more progressive strain of American society. The mural series also includes an explicit critique of the contemporaneous rise of Nazism and Fascism. The depiction of America in the Left Panel in a context of Mexican politics is testimony to Rivera's attempt to combine national and international outlooks.

Rivera's relationship to the Rockefeller family was particularly topical at the time the Left Panel of the National Palace mural was painted. An earlier fresco entitled *Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future* (1933) (fig. 5.21), which Rivera had painted in the R.C.A. (Radio Corporation of America) building at the 'Rockefeller Center' had caused a great scandal.

This mural was initially painted at the request of Nelson Rockefeller but was destroyed at Rivera's request after his refusal to paint over Lenin's portrait (fig. 5.22). Rivera later speaks scathingly of Rockefeller and clearly outlines their political differences concerning the function of art:

I'm sure that the class of person who is capable of being offended by the portrait of a deceased great man, would feel offended, given such a mentality, by the entire conception of my painting. (Rivera quoted in Wolfe 1939: 364)

Rivera saw himself as directly politically opposed to Rockefeller; however, in their attitude towards the collection of indigenous ‘folk’ art, these two celebrated men had a similar outlook. Rivera ‘was one of the first individuals to develop a sizeable collection (sixty-thousand objects) of pre-Columbian artefacts, often driving himself to the brink of bankruptcy in order to purchase a prized “*ídolo*” (Brown 1998: 139). In post-revolutionary Mexico the culture of indigenous peoples was relegated to the status of ‘folk culture’ and folkloric art was at once elevated as collectable in settings and situations which removed it from its original cultural context. This marginalised and distorted the cultural meanings and intentions of indigenous artefacts and sacred objects. They were reduced to commodities and presentations whose use value and cultural capital were defined by Western discourses. The objects were incorporated into a European aesthetic language, their meanings destroyed and defined again in the terms of ‘etic’ Western paradigms. Both Rivera and the Rockefeller family were avid collectors of Mexican art and artefacts. Nelson A. Rockefeller returned from his first visit to Mexico in 1933 with ‘twenty-six cases of popular art, stone sculpture and pre-Hispanic pottery’ (O’Neill 1984)⁶⁴. The curator of an exhibition of the Rockefeller collection of ‘Mexican Folk Art’, describes his affinity with artists, including Rivera:

In Mexico Rockefeller discovered a group of people who shared his passion for popular arts. This group included some of the bright lights of contemporary Mexican Art history. (O’Neill 1984)

⁶⁴ No page numbers in original.

Siqueiros had noticed this tendency of Rivera's to exoticise and marginalise the cultural products of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. In a vitriolic attack entitled 'Rivera's Counter-Revolutionary Road' in the American socialist journal *The New Masses*, Siqueiros describes Rivera's treatment of the indigenous as based on a Westerner's view framed by his outlook of 'the mental tourist par excellence' who objectifies the 'Indian' for his own gain: 'Indianist, folklorist, archaeologist. (Picasso in Aztec-land!)'. Siqueiros states that this is an attitude which 'reaches as far as the introduction for his *Portrait of America*' and prevents him from becoming 'a real internationalist' (Siqueiros 1934: 17).

Wolfe, conversely, places Rivera's approach at once within the arena of the international painting of social critique, throughout the ages and at the cutting edge of political art directly expressing a Marxist approach:

As against all the Courbets and Davids and Delacroix, all the Van Goghs and Millets, all the Meuniers and Steinlens and Kollwitzes of the nineteenth century and thus far into the twentieth, here was the first revolutionary painting definitely inspired in and seeking to express the ideology of Marxism. (Wolfe 1939: 302)

The sweeping generalisation and broad definition of 'revolutionary art', notwithstanding, Wolfe states that the political impact of the work is consciously didactic and unique in its direct and literal

portrayal of a Marxist standpoint. As I outlined in Chapter Three, Rivera had received a formative, international education having served a fourteen-year apprenticeship in Europe (1907-1921) and he later travelled again and painted in the Soviet Union (1927-1928) and, as mentioned earlier, he visited the United States (1930-1934). In the Left Panel, the artist had clearly drawn on experiences of political activity and of being exposed to international revolutionary art. Zone 10 unmistakably includes a kind of political satire of bourgeois decadence and fascism related to that which characterised the work of *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), which originated in Berlin. Parallels can be drawn between the work of Rivera and that of the communist artist George Grosz (1893-1959) in his graphic portfolios *The Face of the Ruling Class* (1921) and *Ecce Homo* (1923).⁶⁵ These works were radical and controversial as they laid bare the realities of bourgeois hypocrisy and class injustice. The plates for the *Ecce Homo* series, which mocked the German military, were confiscated after a trial in which Grosz was charged with offending public morals. Grosz's work contains some resonances with stylistic and thematic elements of the Left Panel. Both artists' works contain montage, Marxist political satire and specific sardonic portrayals of the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie. Grosz was explicit about his Communist stance.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Rivera had visited Berlin in 1928 and his 'friend and host' was Muenzenberg. Rivera visited Russia with Muenzenberg who was a close companion 'a former shoeshine boy who had been tutored by Lenin himself' (Rivera and March 1991: 87). As a member of the German Communist Party Grosz was and politically connected to Willi Münzenberg who was a friend of Rivera⁶⁵. Münzenberg collected statements from the muralist which were published in a book by Lotte Schwartz. The book *Das Werk Diego Riveras*, was published by Neuer Deutscher Verlag headed by Münzenberg (Rivera with March 1991: 84).

⁶⁶ 'You can't be indifferent about your position in this trade, about your attitude toward the problem of the masses, a problem which is no problem if

The comparable satirical style and representational similarity with Grosz's work are particularly apparent in Rivera's representation of Calles with real 'pillars' of the Catholic Church and the military (fig. 5.23). In Rivera's depiction of Calles as part of an 'unholy trinity', the trio are joined through the unbroken line created by the undulating line of the presidential chair and the symmetry of the composition. The figures representing the military and Church are caricatured so as to ridicule their supposed power which is that of the privilege which comes at the price of corruption. The authority of the two institutions represented by top-ranking officials can be traced back to the corporate structure of colonial times. The two most powerful socio-economic structures, the military and the Church, possessed both specific privileges called *fueros*, including tax exemption, and judicial systems independent of the civil court system (Kirkwood 2000: 66). Calles is pictured here with the demagogues of these institutions as his misuse of power makes him comparable to them. The Church figure is made to look ape-like and recalls the caricature of Grosz's political cartoons. Grosz's *Pillars of Society* (1926) (fig. 5.24) shows similar representations of the military and church, dehumanised through satire in zone 10. The mimicry integral to this style degrades the representative of Catholicism to a position below 'civilisation', which is represented by Marx and politicised workers in the composition above (fig. 5.30). In contrast to the portrayal of the horse-like peasants (fig. 5.6), the likening of the Archbishop Pascual Díaz y Barreto to an animal is intended to diminish his power. The machismo

you can see straight. Are you on the side of the exploiters or on the side of the masses who are giving the exploiters a good tanning?' (Grosz 1992 [1921]: 270).

of General Pablo González is accentuated by his square jaw. These scathing caricatures ridicule the exaggerated and misused power of the three ‘pillars of society’.

Rivera’s depiction of Calles in league with North American capitalists is firmly rooted in the real socio-economic context of his presidential rule. In 1925 Calles ordered the surrender of oil holdings from companies and a stormy political battle followed which lasted two years. Calles capitulated to the extent that he secured a reaffirmation by the Supreme Court of the principle of national ownership, but alongside a declaration that its application to national holdings acquired before 1917 was unconstitutional (Camacho 1973: 171). The challenges of the Calles presidency must also be taken into account when considering Rivera’s satirical portrayal. The immediate post-revolutionary situation had left different factions warring against each other and the charge of reconstructing the war-torn nation was potentially insurmountable.

The task of creating a viable, coherent nation, a nation that was more than a mere “geographical expression”— was never more daunting, never more pressing. It is only in terms of these circumstances that we can understand Carranza’s prickly nationalism or Calles’ fervid anticlericalism. As for Mexico’s Indians, they constituted a major challenge to the nationalist project. For them the nation-state was, at best, a source of fiscal and other demands; they owed it no loyalty. (Knight 1990: 84)

Rivera's intention was to depict harsh reality through the cynical expression and links with various features of bourgeois society in the cages of zone 10. In the memoirs he expresses his contrasting sentiments towards the two presidents Calles and Cárdenas:

As for Calles, he was later kicked out of power by my good friend Lázaro Cárdenas, recent president of Mexico. With appropriate civilian and military rites, he long ago descended into hell, where his smouldering body has an honor guard of reactionaries, his former enemies when he pretended to be a revolutionary. (Rivera 1991: 96)

The middle classes and corrupt Calles government are graphically depicted as imprisoned by their materialistic and alienated ways through the symbol of enclosure in the cage-like cells. Their links to American finance trap them in the 'iron cage' of capitalism. Rivera's intended depiction of the social reality and corruption of Calles in zone 10 moves to the contrasting image of hope for a revolutionary Utopia in zone 11.

Zone 11: Uprising and Utopia

A towering portrait of Karl Marx dominates the composition in zone 11 (fig. 5.25). In his left hand he holds a passage from the 1848 Communist Manifesto which reads "Toda la historia de la sociedad humana hasta el día es una historia de LUCHA DE CLASES", followed by "NO TRATA DE REFORMAR LA SOCIEDAD ACTUAL SINO DE

FORMAR UNA NUEVA". An azure sky forms the background to this condensed scene, the glowing sun surrounds Marx and places him in a spotlight emphasizing his importance. Still further back on the horizon are blazing buildings. The dominant figure of the revolutionary leader is flanked by the silhouettes of factories and grain silos. He points towards an industrial scene, a field of trees and a ship which displays a red flag with a hammer and sickle and many lines of smaller flags which are discernible on careful inspection. The great, white, bearded revolutionary leader overlooks the whole Left Panel scene facing three figures of worker, peasant and soldier. The right hand of the worker holds the left of the peasant. To the right of this trinity, many hands are raised, some with clenched fists towards the furled, red flag behind them. A hammer and a sickle are held up by one of these fists and they create a living symbol of the design typically printed on the communist flag. Marx points prophetically towards a future which is partially left to the imagination of the viewer. The scene to the right of him depicts progress in the form of a cathartic vista showing a tranquil, new order. To his left is a turbulent scene of political uprising. Sombreros, worker's caps, soldier's hats, bullet belts, masks and dark faces embody this successful proletarian uprising. In the crowd, hands are held in defiant gestures in the crowd. The prominent figure of an agitator dressed as an archetypal Russian worker in blue overalls and a cap stands above the masses. His left hand is pointing upwards and his right fist clenched. The furled red flag and the hammer and sickle, mentioned earlier act as a backdrop behind his head.

How We Were Freed and Became Glorious

I portrayed Karl Marx exhorting the suffering workers to break their chains, and pointing to a vision of a future industrialized and socialized land of peace and plenty.

(Rivera 1991: 131)

The main themes of zone 11 are those outlined by the above quotation from Rivera's life history: victorious Marxist struggle and a utopian future. Integral to this image is the national symbol of the *mestizo* presented as a trinity of workers united in harmony looking out towards a vision of a 'golden age'. In his classic portrayal of the Mexican personality, *El laberinto de la soledad*, Octavio Paz attaches the notion of a golden age universally to revolutionary utopias:

Casi siempre la utopía supone la previa existencia, en un pasado remoto, de "una edad de oro" que justifica y hace viable la acción revolucionaria. (Paz 1993a: 288)

Rivera creates a paradoxical image of an 'international Mexican' at the threshold of the 'golden age' represented by the distant world of industrial harmony. The artist overtly critiques patriotic and nationalistic movements in an article entitled *Nacionalismo y Arte* (Nationalism and Art) published in *The Worker's Age* New York on 15 June 1933:

Una de las ideas más fáciles de explotar para los arrivistas de la burguesía y de la pequeña burguesía, en este momento, es el nacionalismo y el patriotismo profesional.
(Rivera 1996 [1933]: 181)

Despite Rivera's anti-nationalist words, the utopian image projected in zone 11 concludes the mythological cycle according to Smith's theory of Nationalist ethnomythology. This projected 'golden age' is the stage that completes the mythological cycle and 'informs the central concept of nationalism, that of regeneration, together with associated notions of authenticity and autonomy' (1999: 67). The final element of this formation is aptly named a Myth of Regeneration, or *How to Restore the Golden Age and Renew Our Community as 'in the Days of Old'* (Smith 1999: 67). According to Smith, in this phase of nationalist ethnomythology, 'we move from the sphere of explanatory myth to that of prescriptive ideology: from an idealised epic history to an account of required actions, or rationale of collective mobilisation. The utopia projected through the Left Panel at once follows this universal formula yet is simultaneously culturally-specific to the nationalist situation in post-revolutionary Mexico. The symbol of the Mexican *mestizo* provides a seemingly inclusive all-encompassing unity for the working classes which includes the redeemed, assimilated 'Indian'. The industrial future represented by Rivera, is an example of a mythological 'ideal state', which given its unattainable status in an imperfect world, stays 'unfulfilled' due to 'the nature of social and geopolitical relations' (Smith 1999: 68). García Canclini considers the intimate links between the artistic projections of an

imagined, utopian community and politics. He also explains the necessity for a rhetorical mask in times of political uncertainty:

La historia cultural mexicana de los años treinta a cincuenta muestra la fragilidad de esa utopía y el desgaste que fue sufriendo a causa de condiciones intra-artísticas y sociopolíticas. (García Canclini 1989: 79)

It may be strongly argued that the vision in zone 11 provides such a mask through presenting a cathartic image of another world where all political problems are resolved. Smith explains that the mythological facade, creating a rhetorical Utopia through the 'Myth of Regeneration' must be 'psychologically compelling, if logically incoherent' (1999: 68). The montage style is particularly applicable when considering this incoherent, contradictory structure of myth, as discordant elements can be juxtaposed and de-contextualised to present a hyper-real situation. The situation of viewing different moments of past, present and future history simultaneously is entirely in keeping with this incoherency when viewed through the Western chronological ordering of events. The social order of society can be reordered in this vision, creating a visual hierarchy of the oppressed, conservative, Catholic 'Indian' in the lowest region of zone 9 and the 'liberated' politicised *mestizo* worker in the highest position in this social order in zone 11. The 'liberated' politicised workers in zone 11 are depicted on an open landscape, symbolising freedom and including both the seriousness of industry and the ameliorating charm of the natural landscape. Only

the leader Marx towers over these workers, like a guiding messiah and only the vanguard agitator stands over the striking crowd.

To many on the left in the 1930s, this utopian Marxist dream seemed a plausible future reality. Rivera aligned himself with international Communist politics despite his expulsion in 1929 from the Mexican Communist Party, as he makes clear in the following excerpt from an article which appeared in the *United Press*, New York 15 May 1933 and in *El Universal* the following day:

La única solución es la que los enseñó Karl Marx. Yo creo que el comunismo, como se practica en Rusia es todo un éxito y aunque no voy de acuerdo con algunos puntos políticos, apoyo el comunismo seguido por Stalin. (Rivera 1999 [1933]: 65-66)

Rivera in fact intended the entire mural series *History of the Mexican People* to be dialectical in a Marxist sense. The Left Panel was created during a specific historical juncture, a time in which particular political hopes existed which were often couched in as quasi-messianic discourse and symbolism. As Robin Skelton points out, during the 1930s, Communist Utopia was strongly linked to a symbolic repertoire of absolute faith: 'Marx was God, Freud was his Prophet. Both had iconoclastic effects; both upset the bourgeoisie and laid bare the springs of action' (1964: 31). During the 1930s a Marxist future also seemed to many on the international Left to be the only credible alternative to the rise of fascism, and at this time, this dream appeared to be a living reality in the USSR, before the terrors of

Stalinism were apparent. Rivera had been a member of the Mexican Communist Party between 1922 and 1929.⁶⁷ He rejoined the Party in 1954 and was continually actively involved with radical politics (fig. 5.26) He also would be familiar with the cutting-edge of Communist ideas in America at this time as he had just returned from a three year working visit between 1931 and 1933.

The New Masses, the North American Communist Party periodical of this period, to which Siqueiros and Rivera both contributed, expresses the optimism for a new order in the context of battling, international, political forces:

MAY DAY, [...] occurs this year in a framework probably unparalleled in history. A smoldering old world may break into flames any day and a new world will arise. A forecast of the new world — more than that, the new world itself, is here: the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics comprising one-tenth of the world. May Day 1934, will be a threat—and a promise—to the remaining five-tenths. A threat to the ruling classes, who maintain power only by the most violent terrorism of the swastika, a promise to the liberated working class of the Soviet Union and to the enslaved millions outside. (*The New Masses* 1934: 1)

⁶⁷ Rivera joined the Communist Party in the autumn of 1922 less than a year after his return from Europe, within the party he formed an independent union, 'the Revolutionary Union of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors' with Siqueiros and Guerrero, with whom he was also elected in 1923 to the Communist Party's Central Committee (Marnham 1998: 176). Rivera remained loyal to Marxist principles despite his expulsion from the Communist Party in 1929.

Rivera's depiction in zone 11 contains an image of the agitator inciting a crowd (fig. 5.27) behind which the 'smouldering old world' is bursting into flames (fig. 5.28). The image of a utopian future to which Marx points, is a vision which illustrates the statement that 'any day and a new world will arise'. The 'violent terrorism of the swastika' as illustrated in zone 10 above bourgeois education is replaced by revolutionary symbolism in zone 11.

Revolutionary Symbols

The symbolism in zone 11 has similar attributes to the iconography employed in religious ritual and the power of projected representations is augmented by this link between the sacred and the secular. The mural deploys revolutionary symbols, actively replacing religious imagery, to signal the changes from the sacred to the secular. Hennessy argues that the deployment of religious symbolism in revolutionary iconography is not incidental but a device to mobilise popular support:

This Populism is an indispensable ingredient of revolutionary ideologies, although in some cases it is more explicit than in others. An important but difficult function of this aspect of revolutionary mythogenesis is to make the familiar sacred, and that is one reason why revolutionary iconography often utilises religious symbolism. (Hennessy 1991: 682)

The hammer and the sickle are part of a recognisable repertoire of revolutionary symbols. These particular forms represent labour (the worker and peasant respectively) and a Russian form of Communism—as depicted on the new Revolutionary Soviet Flag. In zone 11 Rivera shows these symbols actively used in the hands of worker and peasant, a device which both intensifies and vivifies the power of the revolutionary iconography (fig. 5.29). The two larger flags in the composition depicting the hammer and sickle also connote the process of change. The flag at rest suggests latent possibilities, as if in the future it will be flying in full glory, like the smaller flag on the ship in the distance on which the hammer and sickle are now imprinted. In this depiction of a far-away future, the smaller flag suggests a correlation between physical distance and temporal remoteness hence the stirring of latent possibilities. The openness of this landscape gives a sense of freedom compared to the harsh sombre colours in zones 9 and 10 which imply a dark era in contrast to the future which is literally brighter because it appears illuminated by the sun. The image is of a new society that will surely free the worker and make him glorious as opposed to wretched, as he is shown to be at the start of the Left Panel narrative. Rivera clearly states that his work is a product of dialectical materialism intended to educate and produce changes:

La verdadera razón por la cual mi obra en Detroit levantó tantos ataques, fue porque era completa e implícitamente un producto del materialismo dialéctico, y sus oponentes, aunque nunca habían oído ese término, se sintieron

instintivamente ultrajados por la naturaleza de la pintura.

(Rivera 1996 [1933]: 171)

Messiah Marx

The process of dialectical materialism is not natural and cannot be left to chance. It requires agents such as political artists to facilitate changes. Throughout his mural career Rivera depicted such agents in the form of revolutionary martyrs as discussed in Chapters Three and Four. This international Communist stance was applied in the Left Panel in a nationalist political context. Rivera's hopes for a communal future are fused with his faith in Lázaro Cárdenas who became president in December 1934. For many on the left Cárdenas represented new optimism for political change. He was the president who came closest to implementing the ideals of the 1917 Revolutionary Constitution as he attempted to unify the Mexican workforce and promote agrarian redistribution. Later he nationalised the oil industry. The world economic depression that affected Mexico between 1929 and 1934, exacerbating the difficult conditions of reconstruction, began to turn around at the time that Cárdenas was elected president. These changes along with his more radical policies heralded a new era in the implementation of revolutionary promises. Both Marx and Cárdenas were seen by many on the Mexican Left as saviours and prophets heralding change. Becker observes how the messianic status of the President impacted on the image of the 'Indian' as powerless: Preoccupied by this image of Cárdenas as either redeemer or tarnished messiah, scholars have shared an insufficiently political imagery of the peasantry (1995: 4). Becker goes on to explain that 'mental images of

the campesinos true faces' were constructed by Cárdenistas by a process of merging 'their preoccupations and their observations from their earlier grassroots work' (1995: 70). Therefore the revolutionary government under President Cárdenas decided on the characterisation and portrayal of the 'Indian' and used strongly emotive imagery to communicate its vision. This vanguard image projects a disempowered, infantilised depiction of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. The implication of omission of indigenous distinctiveness is that these peoples lack mature autonomy as they are always in need of leadership. They are the pliant objects of historical forces, rather than the subjects of their own destiny. The history of the portrait as an art form itself accords the leaders a certain status. The image of the individual leader from liberator to *caudillo* to paternalist political philosopher leaves the 'follower' in a constant position of subservience.

The portrait of Marx on the left differs from those of the other Mexican revolutionary martyrs such as those depicted in the Central Panel in that it is encoded with a double meaning: at once the portrait of an individual leader and the symbol of an international philosophy. By contrast the Hidalgo and the Revolutionary 'martyrs': Zapata and Villa represent facets of the national movements of Mexican Independence and the revolutionary process respectively. As we have seen, the characterisations in zones 9 and 10 are a scathing critique of the corruption of Calles and the Maximato. They also display the optimism for changes expected under the new presidency of Cárdenas. Rivera explicitly attempts to show an international solution to a national problem.

Calles was known as the 'ultimate *caudillo*' and therefore the image of his individual strength of character was of paramount importance in revolutionary rhetoric. The effect of omitting Cárdenas's portrait from the scene depicting a utopian future, in which Marx is central, on an ideological level, emphasises the collective aspirations of the new president rather than his image as an individual figure. The exclusion of a portrait implicitly identifies Cárdenas with the trio of peasant, worker and soldier, and what Krauze describes as 'his collective, gregarious, anti-individualist being' (1998: 456) is symbolically merged with the Mexican people and Marxist aspirations. This collectivist turn is personified by Marx himself and the individual leader is metonymically substituting the Mexican state itself, whilst simultaneously linking this to the Communist International. Clothing connotes class difference in zone 11, which clearly differentiates between leaders and 'the masses'. Marx wears a suit which distinguishes him from the labouring classes, and his striking white beard can be associated with so many Western patriarchal historical figures. The workers are all dressed in uniforms which further accentuate their anonymity and role as a function rather than an individual with creative agency.

The figure of Marx, as a symbol of collective action, contrasts with the individualised portrayal of both Obregón and Calles in the Central Panel, shoulder to shoulder with other historical leaders, and that of the *jefe máximo* linked to international finance in zone 10. The strong characterisation of these men combined with the conspicuous absence of Cárdenas sets the depicted 'new international revolutionary future' of the people distinctly apart from the long geographically and

culturally specific national historical past and its notorious tradition of national *caudillos*. Contrastingly, Marx is an international figure and the Mexican Communist Party was affiliated to the Third International which was founded by Lenin. By seemingly substituting Marx for Cárdenas, Rivera links the nationalist cause with the international philosophy of Marxism.

The paternalism of the Cárdenas' government is clearly depicted here in a favourable light. The original drawing of the Left Panel contained a personification of 'Mother Mexico' but Rivera changed this later. Yet the allegorical motivation of this gesture remains in the substituted paternal figure of Marx. At this political juncture, the new government would need to create a clear rhetorical distance between the 'revolutionary future' and the 'reactionary past', hence in the final instance of this utopian version of *mestizo* life in post-revolutionary Mexico, Marx points to the future. The religious, 'traditional', oppressed 'Indian' in zone 9, is represented as part of this reactionary past. The vision is one of harmony in which the revolutionary state will intervene with paternal beneficence and willing subjects will follow. The towering figure of Marx parallels the guiding status of Quetzalcoatl on the corresponding plane of the right wall. The infantilised figures of the triad of worker, soldier and peasant link hands in friendship on the brink of returning to a 'golden age' (fig. 5.30). The figures are much smaller than Marx and literally look up to him as he points out 'the way' to them. Marx's hand gesture indicates that he is active, yet they stand by passively as followers waiting to be led (5.30). The familiar civilisation/barbarism dichotomy is called to mind as Marx holds a manuscript which may represent his learned status while the worker

holds a hoe, showing he is fit for manual labour. The individual personality of Cárdenas is transplanted with an image of the communal *nosotros* symbolised by Marx and the absence of a presidential portrait. The collective *nosotros* is written in the famous excerpt which Marx holds. He is part of this manifesto as the discourse and the icon both combine a sign and symbol of united emancipation. The leader of the Mexican people is no longer a power hungry *caudillo* but the representative of an international visionary philosophy. The non-appearance of a portrait of Cárdenas at the beginning of his presidency also projects a shift to a new order where the collective rises above individual interests.

Manifesto and *Mestizo*

Rivera unmistakably expresses a serious, didactic political intention behind the image of zone 11, which portrays an optimistic vision of *campesino* and urban workers' future liberation. *The Communist Manifesto* is one of the main didactic tools intended to communicate a class-conscious politics. The socio-political panacea of the Marxist manifesto presented in zone eleven, can be seen as an example of the dimension of the 'the 'drama' of nationalism and its quasi-messianic promises', which are presented 'alongside other quite realistic and concrete goals', for instance:

[...] attaining independence, creating the conditions for self-sustaining growth, building up national institutions, pursuing cultural homogenization and integration,

demarcating the 'homeland', and creating a world of cultural diversity and pluralism. (Smith 1999: 68)

The excerpt from *The Communist Manifesto* symbolises the rationality of the future led by the logic of dialectical materialism, which is based on the premise that material life determines consciousness. The comparison of this image with the panel entitled *Proletarian Unity* from Rivera's The New Worker's School series 1933 (fig. 5. 31) displaying an excerpt from *The Communist Manifesto* in English, reinforces the idea that Rivera's main overt motivation was an international political vision. These international revolutionary leaders unite hands of different colours (5.32). The symbolism of united hands is echoed in zone 11 as the *campesino*, soldier and worker join hands (5.33).

This symbol of fraternal equality projects an image of racial egalitarianism as all hands are similar, so each member of the brotherhood is seen as equal but different. Unorganised political life and corruption have manifested themselves as the antithesis of Marxist organisation and result in the Capitalist greed, inequality and violence which dominate the rest of the Left Panel composition. An image of equality in class relationships in zone 11 is counterpoised with the cynical and alienated relationships in zone 10.

The written word is seen as a mark of civilisation in zone 11. The predominance of textual messages in the Left Panel emphasises the principles of Marxian dialectical materialism in which opposing positions are ultimately synthesised into a collective view. One commentator states that the predominance of writing and teaching in the Left Panel creates a number of 'mini-narratives' (Folgarait 1998:

106). Such mini-narratives are contained in the various vignettes depicted throughout, for example: atrocities towards workers, a repressed strike, the teaching of bourgeois values, the role of the media. Folgarait distinguishes between 'figurative' and 'discursive' elements in the mural defining the two as separate modes of communication:

By figurative, I mean immediate, bodily, presentational, intuitive, and nonverbal; and by discursive, theoretical, representational, mediated, contemplative, verbal and institutional. (1998: 102)

Folgarait argues that writing 'tells of something other than itself as material presence; thus the status of writing and reading are secondary to (in the sense of serving) that signified other' (1998: 102). In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1983) explains how the advent of print culture reinforced the political power and discursive legitimacy of Western hegemonic forms. Writing represents 'civilisation' and 'progress' hence the illiterate are disenfranchised and devalued, and their oral traditions literally written out of history. In the Left Panel *The Communist Manifesto* is written in Castilian Spanish, taking no account of over 50 indigenous languages spoken in Mexico at the time. Living 'Indian' cultures are erased from the picture. This use of writing and the Manifesto as the main didactic tool reinforces the idea that the oral tradition is deemed inferior and does not conform to the idea of liberal progress, non-written oral customs and cultures are relegated to the realms of folklore and anthropology as depicted in

Mexico Prehispanico on the Right Panel of the mural. The indigenous peoples of Mexico are assimilated here into the *mestizo* and are once again seen as objects spoken to (this time by the great white revolutionary) rather than subjects who speak. The diverse literary forms of indigenous cultures are absent in the vision of the future indicated by Marx, as the Manifesto transcends the different indigenous narrative: types of myth, prayer and songs. In the modern civilising narrative, these artistic and religious forms which transmit culture are diminished into a model of quaint folklore or 'backward' superstition.

The image of a new utopian future was to be obtained by concrete and realistic measures. Further authenticity was added to the myth of the 'golden age' by mixture of the fact of insurgence and the fiction of the vision of an otherworldly outcome.

Realistic and Concrete Goals: *Huelga*

Rivera attempted to portray the hope for transformations which would herald a new era in Mexican politics. The fundamental weapon of change during the Cárdenas years was public, strident, and continually dramatic: countrywide labour agitation. Rivera's inclusion of the politically active indigenes, albeit now merged into the *mestizos*, was entirely in keeping with Dawson's assertion that, in the 1930s *indigenista* scholars were searching for 'examples of Indians who were enthusiastically co-operating in the construction of revolutionary projects in order to join forces with other elements of Mexican society' (1998: 298).

Rivera depicts the active process by which the revolutionary promises are to be fulfilled: radical labour action in the mural heralds a new era. This realistic action combined with a utopian outcome adds credibility to the future vision. The difference between the strikes depicted in the different phases of the narrative is that the one in zone 11 is successful and led by an agitator (fig. 5.27) and the one in zone 9 is defeated by the armed forces (fig. 5.5). This change in the role of the military is highly pertinent in the light of the historical juncture in which Calles and Cárdenas vied for popular support. When, during the Cárdenas presidency, the number of labour strikes soared 'he had a powerful public showdown with the more conservative and often intimidating popular forces linked to Calles. In the period of the Calles presidency (1925-1928) there were ninety-nine strikes in total and three hundred and eleven for the duration of the *Maximato* (1929-1934) compared to two thousand eleven hundred and twenty-one throughout the Cárdenas presidency (1935-40). The more democratic nature of the government after 1934 allowed for more accommodation towards popular demands and therefore more public display of strength through strikes (Craven 2002).

Many of the crowd in zone 9 are injured and the armed forces dominate the struggle and are protected by gas masks, sharp knives, uniforms and guns (fig. 5.34). The defeated workers have only sticks and stones to defend themselves and they hold their hands to their heads in a gesture of despair. In contrast Zone 11 represents politicised military forces as they join Marx in solidarity with peasant and worker. Rivera uses visual ellipsis to characterise various figures by depicting just their heads and arms. The body as a whole is

represented through fragments and the viewer is obliged to imagine the rest. The strike in zone 11 shows a sea of workers' hats and a distinct absence of military oppression (5.35).

In zone 11 fists are clenched in the defiant sign of workers' solidarity, symbolising power through unity. The 'masses' are now depicted holding sombreros armed with guns and bullets. Both these signs of peasant and revolution respectively, recall the condensed symbolism of Rivera's cubist *Zapatista Landscape* (fig. 5.36).

Rivera's famed hybrid, Mexican-Cubist, composition, is subtitled *The Guerrilla* and blends the symbolism of the sombrero, the gun and the mountain. This symbolism has the effect of reducing the Zapatista, which was the branch of the revolutionary forces most identified with the indigenous peoples of Mexico, to these few elements. This representational reductionism has parallels with the collective socio-cultural reductionism which equated the indigenous peoples of Mexico with the land, represented by the mountain, exotic costume (the wide-brimmed hat and coloured poncho) and armed resistance (the gun). Landscape was an integral part of the image of the indigenous peoples of Mexico projected in the post-revolutionary nationalist ethnomythology of *Mexico of Today and in the Future*

'Special Territory': The Landscape of Liberation

There are several features in zone 11 which intensify Rivera's representation of a new, internationally modelled, utopian future and the liberation of the Mexican people. This trope of 'liberty' is strongly resonant with the idea that the community will be restored as to its former splendour through the heroism of its leaders. According to

nationalist ethnomythology, the leaders will liberate the populace into a condition of 'glorious freedom' (Smith 1999: 65). Marx points prophetically towards a potential scene which, due to its remoteness, is partially left to the imagination of the viewer; a domain where hopes and dreams are given free rein, unencumbered by mundane practicalities and the immovable objects of history. The open landscape which Marx indicates (fig. 5.25) is ordered and contains regular patterns in the planted fields, the whites and comparatively paler palette of the organised industrialised future are counterpoised with the receding unrest in the top right hand corner (figs. 5.27 and 5.28). In this area of turmoil the colours are the fiery orange of flames and the red of the large communist flag and smaller flags marching in the utopian industrial future (fig. 5.37). The detail and paleness of these distant objects sets this apart from the sombre darkness of the clothes and backgrounds of those grim and grotesque characters enclosed in the cells of zone 10. The contrasting absence of figures in the future scene suggests it exists in suspended animation, waiting to be inhabited by workers. Images of bright, new expectations are illuminated through the use of pale colours and contrast.

This absence of human figures also inadvertently proposes that this modernist Marxist Utopia is an unearthly 'promised land', as it is uninhabited by the turmoil of humanity, represented by the densely-packed scenes in the rest of the panel. Compared to those crushed under the machinery of capitalism in zone 9 or incarcerated by the cells in zone 10, the workers in zone 11 are either struggling or 'free' in an open landscape. The worker's uprising in zone 11 depicts the power of 'the masses' to create revolutionary change. John Hartley observes

how the 'new masses' were also considered to be 'masters' of their own destinies:

Unnumbered, anonymous, the 'masses' were also 'masters' – they could vote, consume, sustain major institutions and cultural forms (from unions to cinema), and take physical actions, from fun to fighting, that might have national or international consequences. (2003 36)

Hartley goes on to describe the double-edged sword of the vanguardist liberation of 'the masses' as they are objectified and 'transformed' according to the projected objectives of their 'leaders':

Meanwhile, they were subject to scientific investigation and psychological experiment, to missionaries and educationalists, all of whom wanted to bridge the gulf of unknowability, in order to fill the gap with their own knowledge, behaviour, belief and enlightenment. (2003: 36)

The exact nature of this reformist redemption of the 'masses' was decided by intellectuals, educators and government. The murals acted as public spaces on which the potential triumphs of transformation were inscribed. As Dawson points out, this public transmission of values was integral to *indigenista* movements in post-revolutionary Mexico. He states that like 'most reformist movements during this period, *indigenismo* operated in highly contested public spaces on the national, regional, and local levels' (1998: 280). The public centrality of the National Palace meant *History of the Mexican People* was inevitably

in a public space which would encourage transmission, contestation, consolidation and negotiation of projected representations.

‘Special Identity’: The Internationalist *Mestizo*

The preferred *indigenista* image projected into the public spaces of the post-revolutionary Cárdenista Mexican State was what Folgarait describes as an artificial inclusiveness (1998: 137). He states that the ‘public’ spectacle of the murals was integral to the projection of this *exceptional* inclusiveness which was granted by the government. ‘Only in the “spaces” of the government is the experience available, and only by the grace of the policies of the regime’ (Folgarait 1998: 137). This ‘special’ situation of racial inclusiveness is depicted through the image of the liberated *mestizo* workers, joining hands in zone 11. Smith holds that an integral component of nationalist ethnomythology is the presentation of the people as possessors of a ‘special identity’ (1998: 68). This singularity is obtained by virtue of ‘a particular freedom, that of developing a specific culture through an ethnically responsive press, judiciary, church and educational system, and an ethnically aware literature and art’ (1998: 68). The ultimate symbol of ethnic awareness in the case of the Mexican cultural politics is the *mestizo*. The creation of a ‘unique’ Mexican people through a mixture of racial groups of European and indigenous origins provided the supreme symbol of the allegedly quintessential, revolutionary spirit of the Mexican. This soldering of *mestizo* and revolution projected the image of transgressing restrictive definitions of self and the divisive social codes of the ‘bad old days’. This formulation projected the paradoxical image of the purely Mexican-hybrid, revolutionary *mestizo*. The agglutinative

function of the condensed symbol of the *mestizo* can be seen as a nationalist drive to create a 'special' hybridity which distinguished the Mexican people from 'foreigners' and provided a distinctive unified identity which was a rhetorical force to contend with. We can trace the legacy of this specific 'catch-all' hybrid through Mexican history. Gruzinski reminds us that the 'mestizo process' was 'triggered by the conquest of the New World' (2002: 33). The phenomenon of *mestizaje* is central to understanding the representation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Gruzinski observes that an overemphasis on the resistance to colonisation by Amerindian cultures and the 'borrowing' of Western culture present potential methodological limitations. He argues that such attitudes have 'sometimes locked indigenous society into a purely native and exaggeratedly homogenous framework by systematically excluding mestizo phenomena from the field of observation' (2002: 28). The relationship between *mestizaje* and the indigenous peoples of Mexico is therefore complex and dynamic.

It is clear particularly in the mixed faces in the strike in zone 9 that the Mexican people are represented as *mestizo* and Rivera is championing the peasant and worker. The racial theories of the post-revolutionary period were essential to the rhetoric of unification of the Mexican people. An awareness of Mexican racial theories prevalent at the time can throw light on certain further contradictions within the work and post-revolutionary practice. The Left Panel mural shows elements of nationalistic forms of *mestizaje* within its paradoxical logic and as a result of the historical legacy of certain 'modernising' ideas. Nicola Miller asserts that 'the twin planks' of Mexican Nationalism were opposition to the United States and the cultivation of 'a cult of

mestizaje' (Miller 1999: 138). *Indigenismo* and *mestizaje* were the main racial theories in post-revolutionary Mexico. As Knight points out, '*mestizaje* and nationhood were equated' (Knight 1990: 85). The *mestizo* thus:

[...] became the ideological symbol of the new regime. *Indigenismo* fitted well within this vision, since the very aim of the *indigenistas* was, [...] to integrate the Indians, in other words to "mestizo-ize" them. Or, rather, as the more thoughtful *indigenistas* put it, the aim was to *mestizo-ize* the Indians and, at the same time, to Indianize the *mestizos*, to create a national synthesis on the basis of reciprocal contributions. (Knight 1990: 86)

Knight describes post-revolutionary *indigenismo* as 'intellectually derivative and unoriginal' and as 'acquir[ing] unprecedented power and relevance by virtue of the 'revolutionary circumstances of post-1910' (Knight 1990: 86).

The 'Special Dignity' of the 'Indian'

As I have stated earlier in the chapter, Cárdenas was seen by many people as a messianic hero, heralding in transformative changes to Mexican society. Iconography and symbolism were also integral components in the repertoire of Cárdenas's revolutionary image. Krauze (1998) observes that at the start of his presidency, he made

many symbolic gestures anticipating changes to come.⁶⁸ These included the installation of an internal telephone line so his people could speak directly to him and the opening of the doors of the National Palace to all the groups of peasants and Indians who wished to see him. 'He [also] moved his official residence from the sumptuous Castle of Chapultepec to the more modest residence of Los Pinos' (Krauze 1998: 457). Cárdenas had a particular view of the 'Indian Problem':

He believed that the Indian was a backward proletarian, possessed of a number of vices (alcoholism, fanaticism, isolation etc.) and continually exploited by a variety of class enemies, but open to redemption. (Dawson 2004: 73)

The decade in which the Left Panel was painted was a point in Mexican history in which the *indigenista* image of the passive Indian

⁶⁸ When Cárdenas became president in December 1934 he made public allegiance with the Marxist Vicente Lombardo Toledano leader of the *Confederación General de Obreros y Campesinos de México* (CGOCM). Cárdenas boldly attempted reconciliation between economic growth and the workers' associations and his 'strength derived from the strong bond he established with Mexico's masses' (Levy and Székely 1987: 31). To the Mexican people the quasi-mythological Cárdenas stood for hope and belief in the values and tenets of the Revolutionary Constitution of 1917. Once in power, Cárdenas began actively to recoup the lost viability of the revolution which had been compromised by Obregón and Calles. When Cárdenas was elected, labour was supported to the point of leniency towards strikes if conditions or wages were deemed unsatisfactory. This measure brought the president into conflict with oil companies who would not enter into negotiations with the unions or accept Mexican Supreme Court rulings. In 1938, Cárdenas ordered both the expropriation of oil companies owned by foreign companies outside Mexico and the nationalisation of oil. There was overwhelming popular support for these moves but severe economic repercussions when the oil companies organised a boycott of Mexican oil. The ban was broken only by Nazi Germany, although Cárdenas publicly condemned fascist dictators Hitler, Mussolini and Franco.

had changed to give way to the representation of indigenous peoples as 'rational' political actors. As Dawson points out:

Manuel Gamio's indifferent and isolated Indian of the early 1920s thus gave way in the early 1930s to an Indian who was struggling actively against the conditions of his or her oppression. (1998: 298)

Smith explains that one strong dimension of the 'special dignity' and 'prestige' of 'a chosen community' is as the 'victim' of the claims made on its behalf (1998: 69). The changing post-revolutionary trope of self-redemption of the indigenous 'victims' of history is connected with Smith's notion of 'special dignity'. This change from a passive stereotype to active citizen appeared to be a step-forward as the 'Indian' appeared to step out of a position as social 'victim'. However, in reality this new image of the 'Indian' was still circumscribed by hegemonic parameters. The 'Indian' would be ostensibly liberated from 'primitiveness' by assimilation into Mexican modernity. Cárdenas tried to find an equilibrium between characterising 'Indians' as primitive and dependent on the state, and developing their 'potential' to become part of the nation. Under his guidance Moisés Sáenz headed the *Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas* (DAI) founded in 1936. The aim of the DAI was to provide a 'comprehensive programme of social and cultural elevation' through which 'economic, social, educational, cultural and legal issues could be addressed in a concerted fashion' (Dawson 2004: 68-69). The image of full assimilation of the 'Indian' was fundamental to the rhetorical unification of the nation. Sáenz

proposes a diminished heterogeneity with a paradoxical logic of assimilation. He suggested that ‘if we appropriate the Indians, we will make them both more Indian and naturally, more Mexican (for “Mexican” is, by definition, in part Indian)’ (Sáenz quoted in Dawson 2004: 71).

Rivera’s idea of struggle was a class struggle, in which a homogenised population would unite against the common class enemy. His intention was that many peasants and workers would see the mural and an era of social transformation which would be at once witnessed by the powerful, and empowering to the disenfranchised. Tibol notes that peasants and workers did visit the National Palace during the period in which Rivera painted the mural:

Esto lo hizo Rivera en el edificio histórico central del país, en la escalera monumental de él, adonde todo el mundo puede entrar tan fácilmente como transitar por la calle y donde miles de campesinos y obreros pasan cada semana, donde el presidente tiene que pasar. (Tibol 1999 [1934]: 101)

However, as Folgarait observes, Rivera ‘privileges an already historically sophisticated viewer’ (1998: 102). This erudition was by definition the advantage of a class-based, elitist education which would be wholly unavailable to Mexico’s indigenous population, the government’s rural and urban based education programmes notwithstanding. The message of the Left Panel resonates strongly with this political conception of the ‘oppressed simplicity’ of the apolitical peasant. Through the course of Rivera’s Marxist narrative

showing the miracle of revolutionary struggle the 'peasant/Indian' is displayed as undergoing a transformation into an enlightened revolutionary *mestizo*.

Marjorie Becker draws parallels between the missionary colonialism of Las Casas and Sahagún which sought to coax out the latent Christianity of the 'Indian', and 'the Cárdenistas' approach to human rehabilitation' which saw true *campesino* behaviour lurking underneath (1995: 70). Cárdenas himself intended to remain true to the revolutionary Constitution and expected such nobility of motive from those surrounding him. He supported many projects which intended to assimilate the 'Indian' into the Mexican nation state but ultimately thought that 'modernising' the indigenous peoples of Mexico was their sole path to social 'salvation'. Knight notes how in the shift from Calles to Cárdenas '[t]he night watchman state had to give way to the *estado papá*, the paternalist state' (1990: 84). The president's beneficence contained fatal flaws with regard to the autonomy of the indigenous Mexican. The peasant was now economically bound to the State rather than the *hacendado* and still enjoyed little autonomy or right to self-definition. As Krauze says, modernisation meant a place for the peasant only within the hegemony of the post-revolutionary State machinery:

In Cárdenas's grand design there was an implicit assumption (and a significant error)—his faith in the purity and impartiality of the authorities. The *ejido* linked the peasant to the State much more than to the land. And paternalism could often turn into subjection. The peasant

would run the risk of becoming not a free man but an element of political capital. (Krauze 1998: 469)

Some *indigenista* anthropologists and linguists responded to these problems by moving towards a pluralistic perspective which favoured greater autonomy for indigenous peoples, but by the mid-1930s, the dominant strain within *indigenismo* was connected to Cardenista nationalism and favoured a mobilisation of Indians within a clearly defined corporatist national community (Dawson 1998: 300). Rivera is seen by the eulogised president as a proponent of *indigenismo* and a champion of the causes of both peasant and worker. Stating that the paintbrush is mightier than the sword Cárdenas sees the work as a force for real political action comparable to other great examples of change in Mexican political history.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, Cárdenas praised *indigenismo* as a force for political change and he called Rivera an '*indigenista orgulloso*'. As Knight (1998) reminds us, this movement was beneficial to the indigenous in some respects as it was a marked departure from the flagrant racism of the Porfiriato. Rivera's intended championing of the indigenous peoples of Mexico is, however, in reality absent in the Left Panel as it is subsumed both under the banner of *mestizaje* and a reductive, strategic image of united labour action.

During Cárdenas's presidential campaign, he declared that he would create 'a single workers' front' and attempt to homogenise the variety of different races and cultures existing in Mexico at the time. He re-iterated the nationalist rallying cry by stating that: 'our people present a mosaic of criteria. We will try to fuse them into one' (Krauze

1998: 456). This rhetorical unity would be translated into socio-political action in an effort to solder the Mexican people and unify disparate factions to bring cohesion to a variety of antagonistic revolutionary interests. The various expressions of modernity in zone 11 are encoded with a multilayered form of colonialism. Images of the diversity of the indigenous peoples of Mexico are missing from zone 11 as the racial status of peasant, worker and soldier is presented as the amalgamated race of the *mestizo*. The diverse and distinctive ethnic identities of the Mexican 'Indian' are filtered through a range of historically specific discourses which destroy through silencing and eradicating those whose values were of little use to the modernising, secularising project. The celebration of indigenous identity and difference was absent in post-revolutionary practices except at the superficial level of hegemonic rhetoric and image, which placed the celebration of indigenous cultures securely and safely in the past. This depiction of all modern Mexicans as *mestizo* in the Left Panel of the National Palace Mural, combined with the celebration of *Prehispanic Mexico* on the Right Panel substantiates such hegemonic imagery. The depiction of the *mestizo* merely represented as peasant, worker and soldier in the archetypal 'uniforms' of these occupations, and the implied aspirations towards an industrialised future show some of the forms imposed on indigenous society and the eradication of different aspects of social identity and knowledge such as those described by Aguirre Beltrán and Pozas Arciniega. It is also notable in the uprising of zone 11 that there is an absence of women with the exception of one nondescript face to the left of the agitator. This assimilation or

adaptation into the modernised Mexican state required an eradication of all things 'indigenous'.

Esta adaptación incluye cambios en el vestido, en la alimentación, en sus actitudes respecto a la educación, la medicina científica y las formas de recreación. (Aguirre Beltrán y Pozas Arciniega, 1991: 139)

Authenticity and Pure Descent: 'Loyal Sons of the Nation'

The depictions of redemption in the Left Panel have resonances with the model of transformative education offered by the Casa del Estudiante Indígena (1926-1933), which 'was hailed as the centrepiece of the government's commitment to Indian education' (Dawson 2001: 329). This government 'experiment' in the redemption of the 'Indian', schooled its 'pure' indigenous inmates to 'acquire culture', 'adopt modern dress and practices, learn perfect Spanish, and in turn bring the benefits of modernity into their home communities' (Dawson 2001: 329). The transformed revolutionary *campesino* in the Left Panel has resonances with these cultural tropes of backwardness and progress in the pedagogic discourses of this institution. Students were photographed entering and finishing their education at the Casa to show that the 'civilisation' of the 'Indian' was a 'scientific' possibility (see figs. 5.38 and 5.39). Students of the Casa published a periodical in 1929, entitled *El Indio*. This publication included testimonials and poems with the themes of the plight of the 'Indian' and the talents of Indians. The journal also celebrated the role of the school in redeeming the Indian (Dawson 2001: 350). The *before* and *after* pictures from the

Casa show the redeemed 'Indians' to be inculcated into modern Western ways, this transformation being indicated by changes in hair and dress. The 'backward Indian' wears a sombrero and string sandals exposing his feet, is long haired and dressed in simple-white peasants' clothing, while the 'redeemed Indian' is well-shod, wears a uniform and carries his hat in a regimental manner. In comparison Rivera's 'apolitical Indian' wears similar peasants' clothing and sombrero and is barefoot; the redeemed 'political Indian' worker wears the uniform suited to his task in the modern Western world and has 'smartly' cut hair as a mark of 'civilisation'.

Dawson comments on the ritualistic spectacle and the public posturing of the school's projected image. He states that 'these living symbols [of redemption] needed to do the work of the revolution in order to fulfil their mandate' (2001: 351). Corona reported that over ninety-nine percent of his students returned to rural communities as 'missionaries of progress' who laboured 'with unyielding resolution, ability, and faith, for the cultural, social and economic emancipation of their campesino brethren' (in Dawson 2001: 351). This social experiment actually yielded some surprises for educators who had 'envisioned a school where students would undergo a simple unidirectional process of assimilation' but later found that the results proved to be both ambiguous and contradictory. In an address to the pupils of the school, President Calles speaks of 'elevating' the 'Indian' students to the 'intellectual level' of the 'advantaged classes':

The privileged classes of this country [...] should endeavour to raise the intellectual level of your brothers, so that they

may achieve the same degree of civilisation as you now have.

(Calles 1929 in Dawson 2001: 347)

Rivera's representation of the 'transformation' of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, is part of the same discourse of overt redemption and covert cultural eradication. In the Left Panel, the civilised 'Indian/*mestizo*' is fully assimilated into the Marxist future. Rivera uses a physical hierarchy which literally raises those workers who have been 'civilised' by Marx in zone 11 above the oppressed peasants and corrupt capitalists.

Specific Autonomy: Machete and Machine

Siqueiros accused Rivera of painting 'only general themes, abstract symbols, scholastic, pseudo-Marxist lectures' in Mexico (1934: 17). Folgarait observes that there is 'a lot of writing [...] and a lot of teaching as an activity' on the Left Wall, and that the viewer is put in the position of a student being educated (1998: 129). As I discussed in Chapter Two, Rivera's work was intended to teach and lead but rather than being 'scholastic' and a vehicle for abstractions as Siqueiros suggested, Rivera's intention was to be active as a force of political praxis intended to mobilise resistance via public art.

Rivera utilises symbols of industry and revolution in the Left Panel the peasant's *machete* as an image of resistance is seen near the foot of an 'apolitical peasant' in zone 9 (fig. 5.40). The *machete* can be seen as an image of the struggle for 'specific autonomy'. Smith describes this element of nationalist ethnomythology as 'not any freedom; [but] a collective liberty in which [there is] a specific liberty for that community in those conditions' (1999: 70). Rivera attached this

‘specific autonomy’ to the symbol of indigenous resistance and also anchors it to the contemporary by adding a specific date. Rivera chose to add the date of the mural’s completion: ‘20 November 1935’ on the symbol of the *machete* in zone 9 where we can also see the artist’s signature. The *machete* is also a reminder of Rivera’s links with the Mexican Communist Party as it was the ultimate symbol of workers’ resistance and the name of the official organ *El Machete* between 1924 and 1929. The symbol at the masthead of this publication was accompanied by the following verse.

El Machete sirve para cortar la caña,
para abrir las veredas en los bosques umbríos,
decapitar culebras, tronchar toda cizaña,
y humillar la soberbia de los ricos impíos.
(*El Machete* quoted in Charlot 1963: 245)

In zone 11 the machine is depicted as the symbol of a liberating industrial future. The ‘primitive’ tools of resistance have evolved into the ‘sophistication’ of machinery as the emblem of modernity. The amalgam of often contradictory and discordant elements converging in the *Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros, Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores* is indicative of both the chaotic, post-revolutionary political landscape and the wellspring of hope that emerged through the spirit of revolutionary fervour. This hope was renewed with the Cárdenas presidency, in which the *mestizo* image gained renewed vigour, and this mixing of various contradictory aspirations can be seen clearly in the illusory unity of these elements in the mural. On closer scrutiny

we can discern that the Manifesto's final appeal '[p]or el proletariado del mundo' similarly universalises and eradicates all elements of indigenous culture not included in this modernising category. I have explained that one element of Gamio's stance proposed the greater development of 'universal' (i.e.: Western) culture in the arena of positivistic science and resultant technology. Cardenista *indigenismo* regarded the indigenous peoples of Mexico as backward due to social deprivation in relation to European cultures whilst simultaneously affirming certain positive features of Indigenous culture such as the production of arts and crafts as 'respectable' and worthy of assimilation.

In *Portrait of Mexico* Wolfe says that:

Rivera knows [...] that the machete is powerless against the machine gun and the peasant incapable of redeeming himself except in alliance with and under the guidance of the urban industrial worker. Hence the recurring portrayal of the worker of mine and mill, in labor and in struggle, in meeting and demonstration and strike and in patient and earnest converse with his peasant brother. (1937: 30)

The symbols of machine and *machete* are included in an attempt to create a harmonious fusion between indigenous resistance and Western modernisation as a pluralist panacea. The symbols explicitly assert Rivera's overtly contradictory allegiances. The agrarian Zapatista faction of the revolution is symbolised by the machete and illustrated in zone 9. The machines and fields depicted in the

background are testimony to Rivera's belief in an industrialised future and agrarian organisation as the saviour of the working class. Wolfe comments on Rivera's depiction of tripartite fraternal unity combined with revolutionary symbolism:

And hence the ever-recurring symbols of crossed sickle and hammer and the tripartite unity of worker and peasant and soldier in a common struggle for freedom. (Wolfe 1937: 30)

This unity of revolution, industry and worker's liberation was in fact misleading. Folgarait states that 'the attaining of the Revolution is the illusion here, the maturing of the Nation from Porfirian capitalism into a stable Revolutionary state' and describes the resolution through the 'ritual' viewing of the mural as 'numbing' (1998: 137). Rivera's faith in the machine was strengthened by his experiences in the United States. As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, his murals at the Detroit Institute united the ancestral image of Coatlicue with a celebration of industrial work. For Rivera, as for many on the Left in the 1930s, this machine age symbolised the proletarian strand of the revolution:

[...] todo el mundo critica la era de la máquina, pero yo me declaro en favor de ella. Yo creo que México, debería contar con mayor número de máquinas y opino lo mismo acerca de los Estados Unidos, pero bajo la condición de que los trabajadores sean los propietarios de esas máquinas y no los capitalistas. (Rivera 1999 [1933]: 65)

In this fraternal scene the peasant, worker and soldier are no longer fighting against each other but are united and their silhouettes are backed by the glowing sun, which shines benevolently over the golden age of industrial utopia. The solar symbol is the highest point of the Left Panel and connects with the Right Panel which has a similar sun symbol at an equivalent point in the top, central plane of the composition. This unifying symbol unites the 'golden age' of the future Marxist utopia with the 'golden age' of the Mesoamerican past. The racialised symbols of Prehispanic roots and liberated *mestizo* worker create the image of 'specific autonomy' in an all inclusive image of a post-revolutionary state for *all* the Mexican people. The solar symbol creates a sense of linkage between eras which maintains what Smith describes as the 'lingering sense of the heroic era before the community's decline, and [...] the desire to recover the liberties and rights enjoyed in that golden age' (1999: 70). Thus the pre-Columbian indigenous past is soldered to the industrial future which somehow transforms the post-revolutionary state into an amalgamated 'golden-age' which liberates the 'Indian' into a redeemed, 'civilised' *mestizo* who is connected to his indigenous culture through the 'dignity' of a specifically Mesoamerican ancestral heritage.

Conclusions

The Mexican post-revolutionary situation was complex, volatile and unique. The indigenous peoples were seen to constitute a problem for the governments which presided over Mexico at the time the National Palace mural was painted. Distinctive socio-political and cultural elements combined to produce the Mexican Mural Movement's response to this situation as it was enmeshed in the process of nation-building.

Chapter One outlined how the forging of 'Indian' identity within this political context was conditioned by various factors: the aftermath of the revolution, the anthropological discourse of *indigenismo* and the catalytic energy of Vasconcelos.

The analysis of the interplay between contemporary *indigenista* theory, ideology and visual cultural production is the essence of this thesis. All these elements were in play in the preoccupation to create a national identity in context of post-revolutionary Mexico. The visual dimension of the creation of nationalist imagery was essential, especially due to wide-spread illiteracy. Smith maintains that: '[i]magery has always played a crucial role in politics and nowhere more so than in our understanding of nationalism' (1991: 353). The diversity of images of the 'Indian' produced and reproduced during the process of nation-building by each one of *los tres grandes*, demonstrates the complexities, contradictions and paradoxes of this unpredictable development. Nevertheless, the muralists were habitually regarded as a cohesive unity, producing coalescing visions.

Chapter Two deconstructed this myth of political coherence between the painters. The lack of unity in their vision displays, in part,

the varied political spectrum of *indigenista* thought, which found its most orthodox expression in Rivera's work. The divisions also illustrate radical reactions against *indigenismo* by the aloof autonomy of Orozco and the incisive Marxist politics of Siqueiros.

As public artists, producing monumental works, the muralists were, however, all involved in the process of manufacturing national identity, consciously or otherwise. The powerful emotive impact of the art works produced in the post-revolutionary period and their symbolism often paralleled the authority of religious iconography. Hybrid symbols were produced and reproduced as the murals juxtaposed Mexican and European imagery in order to create a montage of *mexicanidad*. Central to this 'religion' of 'mexican-ness' was the image of the 'Indian', particularly the indigenous past:

The great Indian faces and the overpowering compositions, linked deliberately to ancient Mexican art and to Italian primitives, taught this religion: beauty is all that is native, active, living, earthly all that is productive work. They said *Mexico is for the Mexicans... is socialism* as clearly as Cimabue said Christianity. (Brenner 1971: 65)

In Chapters Three, Four and Five of the analysis of the National Palace mural, the cultural fusions of European and Mexican components displayed in Rivera's montage have been demonstrated. His 'borrowing' of elements from European masterpieces and transposition of them into *History of the Mexican People* are indicative of the ways in which culture is created through a synthesis of diverse

elements including style, form, the artist's motivation and the location of the work. Some commentators have taken the view that '[t]he independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely living things' (Wright Mills quoted in Said 1994: 21). However, Rivera's employment of certain 'Indian' cameos from nineteenth-century academic painters from the *San Carlos* academy illustrates the fact that his work drew on indigenous stereotypes and their socio-cultural resonances which were deeply historically rooted. This expression of continuity rather than change is an example of a central tenet of this thesis which is a re-evaluation of the assumed 'newness' of revolutionary imagery.

Rivera's inimitable *bricolage* of images derived from Mexican and European sources illustrates the culturally-specific dimension of this unique post-revolutionary situation. Nevertheless, further complexities in this historical period have been revealed by the application of Smith's *universal* theory of nationalist ethnosymbolism to an analysis of the National Palace mural. In the light of Smith's focus on the historical basis of nationalist forms, the myth of 'new revolutionary beginnings' for the indigenous peoples of Mexico, is dismantled. This revised logic of seeing through appearances, reveals the institutionalisation of ubiquitous historically-based, nationalist structures and their manifestation in the form of public art. The mechanics of this cultural mythologising about the indigenous are shown by the close fit between the elements representing the Mexican people and the components selected from Smith's theory. In that regard, the fundamental role played in the creation of heritage by the

elevation of the 'Indian' past in *Prehispanic Mexicio* and the eradication of the complexities of the contemporary 'Indian' present in the vision of *Mexico of Today and in the Future* are instructive.

The overpowering visual amalgamation of the condensed vision of *History of the Mexican People*, which is presented as the history *belonging* to a people, is deceptively simple. Folgarait's assertion the National Palace Mural acts as a flag which reinforces illusory nationalist cohesion (1998: 115), brings to the fore the fact that representations in the mural may coincide with elements of 'banal nationalism'. For example, seemingly innocuous forms in the mural reflect more insidious, larger ideological structures. Billig stresses that after a national crisis passes 'the irruption soon dies down; the temperature passes, the flags are rolled up; and then its business as usual' (1995: 5). The National Palace mural 'flag', however, is never 'rolled-up' and its reproductions proliferate into the 'banal' spaces of Mexican national life, normalising its cultural assumptions, creating a misleading 'common-sense' reality, a fabricated unity which disguises its significant omissions with a seemingly all-inclusive excess of visual information.

Through the employment of Prownian methodology, I have argued throughout that the qualities of the medium of fresco itself bring a certain merging of vision and reality. In one sense, the mural may be regarded as a metaphor for the reification of cultural *mythologies* and the process by which they become part of the *building* of the nation. The keystone of nationalist construction in this post-revolutionary period was education. The vision of the 'redemption' of the 'Indian' through an 'awakening' of the 'universal' political self expressed with

persistent replication in Rivera's concluding panel of the triptych, illustrates the fact that the artist was unable to detach himself from the misconceptions of his time.

Fundamentally, this thesis presents a critique of the reasoning underlying revolutionary rhetoric. My aim has been to encourage a radical self-reflexivity in the dynamic structures of intellectual practice, rethinking and moving the parameters within which this occurs. This retrospective revisioning does not, however, deny either the 'good faith' of the artist or the well-meaning intentions of certain government interventions concerning indigenous peoples. The utopian vision of *Mexico of Today and in the Future* contained sufficient parallels with the socialist education programmes of the government of Cárdenas for these two post-revolutionary political 'heroes' to have great mutual respect for each other. The President's focus on the creation of a national party was based upon a desire for a unity between worker and peasant with middle-class backing, against the landed elites. Mary Kay Vaughan (1997) has highlighted the fact that this resulted in the commendable efforts of the left of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) to develop a progressive educational and cultural programme, which aimed to implement a dialogue between society and government. Rivera, in fact, consciously believed that his evaluations were grounded in reality and that he was fully aware of the political prerequisites for change:

Nosotros no nos hacemos ilusiones sobre el grado actual de preparación del proletariado latinoamericano para estas tareas grandiosas [...]. (Diego Rivera 1999 [1938]: 220)

Nevertheless, I have clearly shown that the artist could not detach himself from the historical limitations of the post-revolutionary period. The powerful and persistent imagery which he created in the National Palace mural was, as I have demonstrated, largely reflective of certain implicit socio-cultural contradictions which formed part of the fundamental illusions of Mexican *indigenista* rhetoric. The way in which this dissertation has reframed our approach to this monumental work is also testimony to the fact that, for intellectual production to remain vibrant and meaningful, analyses which uncover such cultural *mythologies* are vital.

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5.14 Diego Rivera, *Zapata y Caballo/ Zapata and Horse*, (detail from *La Historia de Cuernavaca y Morelos/ The History of Cuernavaca and Morelos*), 1930. Fresco, 425 x 134 cm, second floor, Cortés Palace, Cuernavaca

5.15 Diego Rivera, *Frida y Cristina/ Frida and Cristina* (detail from fig. 5.2)

5.16 Diego Rivera, *La Maestra Rural/The Rural School Teacher*, 1924. Fresco 4.38 x 3.27m, Ministry of Education, first floor, Court of Labour, Mexico City

5. 17 Diego Rivera *Zone 10, Jaula de Consolidación/ Cage of Consolidation* (detail from fig. 5.1)

5. 18 Diego Rivera, *Educación Burguesa/Bourgeois Education* (detail from fig.5.17)

5.19 Diego Rivera *Rockefeller, Sinclair, Durant, Vanderbilt, and Mellon* (detail from fig.5.18)

5.20 Diego Rivera, *Sacerdote y Prostituta/ Priest and Prostitute* (detail from fig. 5.18)

5.21 Diego Rivera, *Hombre en la Encrucijada que Mira con Esperanza y la Alta Visión a Elegir de un Nuevo y Mejor Futuro/Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future* (1933). Fresco, Museo Palacio de BellasArtes, Mexico City (IBNA)

5.22 Diego Rivera, *Lenin*, (detail from fig. 5.21)

5.23 Diego Rivera, *Calles y 'los Pilares de Sociedad'/ Calles and the 'Pillars of Society'* (detail from fig. 5.17)

5.24 George Grosz, *Pillars of Society*, 1926.Oil on canvas, 200 x 108 cm, Nationalgalerie, Berlin

5.25 Diego Rivera, *Zone 11, Insurrección y Utopía/ Uprising and Utopia* (detail from fig. 5.1)

5.26 Diego Rivera, making a speech to the Mexican Communist Party, 1956

5.27 Diego Rivera, *Insurrección/ Uprising* (detail from fig 5.25)

5.28 Diego Rivera, *Viejo Mundo en Llamas/ Old World in Flames* (detail of fig 5.25)

5.29 Diego Rivera, *Hoz y martillo/ Hammer and Sickle* (detail from fig. 5.25)

5.30 Diego Rivera, *Marx y Mestizo/ Marx and Mestizo* (detail of fig 5.1)

5.31 Diego Rivera, *Proletarian Unity*, (detail from *Portrait of America*), 1933. Fresco, New Workers' School, 183 x 216 cm, Nagoya City Art Museum, Nagoya

5.32 Diego Rivera, *Workers' Hands Unite* (detail from fig 5.31)

5.33 Diego Rivera, *Las Manos de los Trabajadores se Unen/ Workers' Hands Unite* (detail from fig. 5.25)

5.34 Diego Rivera, *Trabajadores Heridos/Wounded Workers* (detail from fig 5.2)

5.35 Diego Rivera, *Insurrección /Uprising* (detail from fig 5.25)

5.36 Diego Rivera, *El Paisaje de Zapatista, el Guerrilla/ Zapatista Landscape, The Guerrilla*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 144 x 123 cm, Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City (IBNA)

5.37 Diego Rivera, *La Utopía Industrial/Industrial Utopia* (detail from fig 5.25)

5.38 Group of Huichol students arriving at the Casa del Estudiante Indígena in 1926. (Ministry of Education photo in Dawson 2004: 25)

5.39 The Huichol students two years after they were admitted to the Casa del Estudiante Indígena.(Muncher Illustrierte Press, October 1931 in Dawson 2004: 26)

5.40 Diego Rivera, *El Machete* (detail of fig 5.2)